A

SYLLABUS OF POETICS

FOUNDED ON

WORDSWORTH, COLERIDGE, SHELLEY AND ARISTOTLE

A BASIS FOR LECTURES

BY

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NOTE

The purpose of the following pages is to point out the fundamental ideas regarding poetry contained in the authors named, and to expand, explain, and apply them to some extent, with a view to helping students to think out the subject for themselves. Further expansion, illustration and comparison are reserved for lectures. The advantage of founding on these authors is that they always *mean something*, and are free from the *verbiage* rather characteristic of writings on this subject.

A SYLLABUS OF

POETICS

FOUNDED ON THE WORKS OF WORDSWORTH, COLERIDGE, SHELLEY AND ARISTOTLE AS A BASIS FOR LECTURES.

Nature of Poetry and its Periods.

Poetry is a revelation of those truths which affect most directly the well-being and destiny of humanity and thereby touch most strongly the human feelings,—expressing them not in abstract formulæ in which they can be reached only by understanding, but in concrete imagery in which they can be seen by the mind's eye intuitively.

Science and Poetry agree in being revelations of truth. Science regards truth (or the world) as existing by itself, and as indifferent to human interests and feelings. Poetry regards the world as the sphere of human life and feeling, and sees and reveals those aspects of its truth which most directly affect humanity. Science reduces the world of concrete things, as far as it can, to a world of abstract laws, and expresses these in abstract formulæ which appeal only to the

understanding; (poetry, proceeding in an opposite direction, expresses abstract truth in concrete images in which it can be *seen* by all, without effort of reasoning. Science speaks in abstractions; poetry speaks in pictures.) Science is interested in truth for its own sake, and is indifferent to human feeling; (poetry indeed rises out of truth—"it is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge")—but it is out of the truth which affects humanity and passes over into feeling, (and its own peculiar sphere is in the feelings of men)(§§ 20, 25).

But the truths which the poet sees and out of which poetic thought and feeling rise, are found in different spheres of nature and life; and there are many different ways of presenting them so as to make others see and feel them. Therefore there are many different kinds or forms of poetry. Thus in English history, we can distinguish, in a general way, seven different 'periods,' in which different circumstances in the English people have given rise to different kinds of poetry—by producing different kinds of thought, rising into different kinds of feeling.

(1) The *Anglo-Saxon Period*, in which the primitive ideas and impulses of the Teutonic race (exhibited in *Beowulf*) are seen becoming transformed and supplemented by the new ideas and feelings introduced by the Christian religion.

(2) The *Period of Romance*, in which the military spirit produced by the conflict of races and the institutions of chivalry, is seen transformed by the spirit of the new religion so far as to result in that spirit of self-sacrifice and voluntary service on the part of the strong in behalf of the weak, which is called chivalry; and the spiritualism of Christianity is seen mixing with the still living spiritualism of pagan times, producing a world of wonder and mystery which is a fitting field for heroic adventure and chivalrous service.

(3) The *period* of which *Chaucer* became the central power,—when many seem to have become weary of Romance, as filling people's minds with unreal things and turning their thoughts away from the world of reality; and which dealt (or pretended to deal) largely with the affairs of real life (as in the "Canterbury Tales") —sometimes burlesqueing romance (as in the "Rime of Sir Topas" of Chaucer, and afterwards in "Don Quixote" of the Spaniard Cervantes).

(4) The *Elizabethan Period* which includes within it a revival of Romance (in Spenser and in many plays of Shakespeare and Fletcher), but, in its great outburst of dramatic literature, sought to see and reveal the deepest truths of life and human nature; but at last, in its lyric poetry, declined from sincere thought and feeling into artificial metaphor and affectation.

(5) The "*Classical*" *Period* (1660-1800) turned away from the extravagance and artificial obscurity of the later Elizabethans, and began to imitate the simplicity of thought and language of the new French School of literature (created by the new Academy); and the dignity and simplicity of structure characteristic of the ancient Latin and Greek poets (called "classical").

But in this way it become largely imitative, and inferior in originality to the preceding periods. To avoid the extravagance of Romance, it dealt mainly with real life and character; but, to imitate the dignity of classical poetry, it confined itself to the upper classes and town society. In dealing with these, it imitated the French and Latin poets by taking mainly their favourite form of satire, and their epigrammatic style. Its straining after classical dignity of style produced a tendency to avoid, as far as possible, the words used in common life and in prose, and to substitute uncommon words, and vague circumlocutions which seemed more consistent with the dignity of poetry. To state particular facts about particular things, seemed to be prosaic; hence generalities were preferred to particulars. This tendency towards an artificial "poetic diction" was carried so far that, towards the end of the century, people came to think that poetry consisted, not in thought and feeling, but in the use of certain words and phrases.

And further, the mechanical discoveries of Descartes and Newton had produced a general feeling that nature, and perhaps life itself, was only machinery; and that there was nothing in the world which could not be subjected to mathematical calculation, and therefore nothing spiritual, and no wonder or mystery anywhere. This tendency towards mechanisation strengthened the reaction against Romance, and led to the superficial and prosaic view of nature and life, characteristic of the period—making it to be the age of prose, "common sense" and utility. Hence to some, poetry seemed to be dying out (*cp.* Blake "To Muses," Palgrave, IV. 1).

(6) (The *New Romanticism* of the 19th century was a reaction against the mechanism and formalism of the preceding period, and a return to a spiritualistic interpretation of nature.) People were beginning to feel that the world is not machinery: that there must be more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in 18th century philosophy and poetry: (that poetry had become superficial, seeing only the outside of things and failing to see that things are full of meanings and suggestions pointing to powers beyond the outward appearances of things, and (that the world is full of wonders and mysteries which cannot be subjected to mathematical calculation;) and that human thought cannot rest at peace without thinking of the realities

lying beyond outward appearances, and their relations to human life and destiny. (Considered in this way, the world "widened to man's view," and an inexhaustible sphere of wonder and mystery, of thought and feeling, opened up, not dreamt of before.) (And in consequence of this new way of thinking, there came a new kind of poetry and a new theory of poetry. This spiritual life which pervades "all thinking things, all objects of all thought," will manifest itself in the mind of the poet also, and poetical creation will itself be prompted and inspired by the creative life which is in nature.) Poetical thought will come spontaneously as if by inspiration. A true poem will not be *made* as a watch is made, by art following rule and model; it will *grow* in the mind of the poet as the flower grows in the soil. And to this inspiring life of nature all classes of people are the same—the lives of common people are as full of meaning and suggest as much thought and feeling as those of the upper classes; (and the true language of poetry is not an artificial language to be called "poetic diction," but the natural language in which thought and feeling clothe themselves spontaneously.)

This return to a more spiritual view of nature manifested itself in two ways—

(*a*) In a re-introduction into literature, of spiritualistic ideas in the form in which they

appear in the older romantic period—the popular belief, never altogether wanting, in the presence in nature of powers which are *super*-natural, *viz.*, spirits, demons, fairies and the like—(a revival from the past previously suggested by the printing of the Ossianic Poems and the Traditional Ballads, which had been preserved orally from former times, and had been imitated crudely in ghost stories such as the *Castle of Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, and *The Monk*, and with more literary power in the quasi-supernatural tales of Mrs. Radcliffe). These beliefs were utilised with more sincerity and greater literary power by Scott in his ballads, by Coleridge in his "Mariner" and "Christabel" and, in their ancient Greek form, by Keats in "Endymion" and "Lamia."

(*b*) But such a revival could no longer be treated with sincerity (except as materials for symbol and allegory); and was now superseded by spiritualism of a more philosophical kind, which seems to have presented itself first to Wordsworth. This was the belief that the supernatural is in the natural, or the "natural supernatural" (Carlyle). To make nature interesting, we need not think of a realm of ghosts, demons and fairies, nymphs and satyrs, dwelling in nature; nature everywhere reveals the presence of a universal spiritual power working in the processes of nature themselves—a central power of

which nature is the outward manifestation "a motion and a spirit which informs all thinking things and objects of all thought, and rolls through all things." This is the "transcendental spiritualism" of Wordsworth which became the poetical philosophy of the 19th century.

These characteristics constitute what has been called Romanticism, as being a revival of the fundamental characteristics of the Romance literature of the middle ages, *i. e.*, literature of the Romance (Romanic) languages, or dialects midway between the ancient Roman (Latin) and modern French, Italian, Spanish, etc., derived from it.

(7) The *Victorian period* continued the Romanticism of the former period as in Tennyson and Arnold, and, though with more artificiality and less sincerity in Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris (the materials rather than the spirit of Romanticism), but returns frequently to realism as in Browning, while its most characteristic feature is the reconciliation of art with inspiration, Classicism with Romanticism,—exhibited especially in the cultivation of picturesqueness and vividness of imagery and description, and harmony of sound, as in Tennyson and Swinburne (following Keats and Shelley, but with more deliberate art). The great romantic poets had used descriptive metaphors and harmony of words mainly as a means of expressing

thought and feeling, they now come to be sought too frequently for their own sake.

First Appearance of Wordsworth

Wordsworth's views on the nature and function of poetry are given most succinctly in the *Preface* of 1800 (to the re-printed *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 with additional poems). The *Ballads* had been so new in language, style and thought and so different from the fashionable poetry of the time, that the literary authorities had been shocked, and had condemned the book as a worthless innovation, written in defiance of taste and good sense and all the established rules and models of poetical composition. The half-playful poems on humble life were pronounced trivial and childish; the more elevated ones (*e.g.*, *Tintern Abbey*) were thought to be nonsense. Wordsworth in the first part of the *Preface* states his purpose in writing the *Ballads*, and justifies his choice of subjects and language; and then, to justify himself further, passes on to a discourse on the nature of poetry in general, and to deduce from that, what the language of poetry should be.

Many critics, from Coleridge onwards, have studied him carelessly, and have represented him as teaching that the subjects and style of his *Ballads* of humble life ought to be the subjects and style of all poetry—both

of his own and that of others. Then, when they find that Wordsworth, like other poets, varies his style in keeping with his subject, they accuse Wordsworth of departing from his principles, and, by his practice, contradicting his own teaching. But Wordsworth never really departed from his teaching which was, that poetry is a revelation of truth; that it consists in thought (truth) and feeling, and not in artificial "poetic diction"; and that thought and feeling are best expressed when expressed in the simplest possible language; and that gaudy language and figures of speech are but disguises to conceal poverty of thought and unreality of feeling.

His protest against the characteristics of the classical period.

The *Preface* was a manifesto of reaction against the style of literature, especially of poetry, which had grown up during the so-called classical period 1660-1800, and reached its extreme form in the later part of the century.

(1) The period itself had begun in a reaction against the extravagance of thought and obscurity of style, into which poetry had fallen in the first half of the 17th century (Euphuism, Marinism, Gongorism) in the so-called 'metaphysical' school, and the noble but heavy and over-learned prose of Taylor, Milton, Browne,

etc., and this reaction had led at first to imitation of the simpler and more natural style introduced into French poetry and prose by the new Academy. The new French school had further checked the extravagance of the older literature in poetry and drama, by introducing the rules drawn out by ancient classical critics (Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, etc.), and observed generally by the classical poets. And the revival of classical influence had led further to extensive imitation of the forms, style, and subjects of classical authors. The rules of Aristotle were adopted in France to regulate dramatic structure (and continued in force there, down to the triumph of the romantic movement there, about 1830), and attempts were made to introduce the same into English drama (as by Dryden in his so-called "heroic" dramas). The Latin satirists with their condensed epigrammatic style became frequent objects of imitation, and the choral odes of Pindar and other Greek poets were imitated by Cowley, Dryden, Gray, Collins, etc. English imitators often surpassed their French and Latin originals—as, *e.g.*, Pope surpassed his originals Boileau and Horace; but the general prevalence of imitation led at last to a want of freshness and originality, which towards the end of the century made many think of poetry as an exhausted subject, doomed soon to disappear—Burns and Blake being the only original poets

of the time the only relief to the genera monotony and mediocrity

(2) This influence of classical authority le to the theory of poetical composition and criticism which prevailed through the century Poetical excellence seemed to consist (largel at least) in imitating certain models and con forming to certain rules The models were th masterpieces of ancient Latin and Greek liter ture (the "classics" or standards), and the rule to be followed were those laid down by ancien scholars, especially Aristotle It was assume that, by these and their successors, the laws an conditions of good poetry had been found ou and settled for ever, and no one who violate them was to be regarded as a genuine poet. revolutionary in literature (like Wordsworth was to be ostracised from the company of poet The application of this principle made th composition of poetry to be largely artificial It seemed as if the use of certain words and phrase the copying of certain models, the applicatio of certain rules, was what mainly distinguishe poetry from prose. Thus poems could be made the poet could learn or be trained to be a poe by careful study of models and laborious appli cation of rules. Shelley protests against this; poet is born not made; a poem is not made but grows—this was the teaching of the new Romantic school

(3) This tendency to imitation and repetition extended itself from subjects, structure and thought to language *i.e.*, to the use of words and phrases. The new ideas regarding the dignity of poetry led to the belief that common things and common words are beneath the dignity of poetry.

Thus instead of describing particular things and stating simple facts, they thought it more dignified to speak of classes of things, and use general propositions. This led to generality and vagueness, and thereby to monotony—one description was too like another—one sentence was an echo of another. This is seen also in prose writers of the period not only in Johnson but to a less extent in historians such as Gibbon and Robertson. Thus, painters have been accused of painting a tree, a rose, a fish, in such a way that one could indeed know it to be tree, rose or fish, but could not know what particular kind of tree, rose or fish it was. They represented only what was common to the whole class, omitting what distinguished individuals (the charge which Ruskin made against the Post-Raphael painters). In the later half of the century both poets and prose writers adopted largely this generalising style, so that one description or narrative often reads like a repetition of another.

The same straining after classical dignity of style led also to the frequent use of parallel and

balanced clauses, and this led to further monotony, because the author was often tempted, for the sake of balance, to repeat nearly the same thing in different words. This is noticeable especially in Johnson. The following parody is strongly burlesque, but it brings out clearly a real characteristic of Johnson and his imitators.

(4) The same tendency made them seek to avoid common words and phrases as vulgar, and substitute uncommon ones as more dignified. And when single words sufficiently dignified could not be found, they expressed the same thing by circumlocutions thinking these more poetical. Thus, to call a man by the common word "man" was thought prosaic; in poetry he should rather be called a "swain" or a "hero." A woman was generally called a "nymph" or the "fair one." The sea was always called "the main." To call a gun, a gun, a spade, a spade, or a boot, a boot, was prose, but if we speak of "the deadly tube" a "horticultural utensil," "the shining leather which encased the limb" (Cowper), we rise, they thought, into poetry.

There are cases, no doubt, in which such periphrases may be justified, as when they give a more vivid picture of the thing than the simple word would do. Thus Milton writes "optic tube" for telescope, "sonorous metal blowing

natural sounds" for trumpet, and even Wordsworth himself speaks of "the feathered denizens of the mere," when he means waterfowl merely; but when repeated too often, they become wearisome, and are usually merely artifices to make prose appear to be poetry.

(c) Another artifice for the same purpose is the frequent use of personifications of abstract qualities. To speak of anger, fear, hate, love and the like, as just what they are, is prose merely; but if we write the words with capital initials, and speak of them as saying and doing things like persons, then we are writing poetry. This figure may sometimes, to be sure, serve a purpose by bringing out a shade of meaning which cannot be brought out otherwise, and is then justifiable (as sometimes by Wordsworth himself, *e.g.*, in "The Yew Trees"). It was very common in the 18th century, and often used even by good poets as Gray and Collins, but was often no better than an artifice to make prose seem to be poetry. The following lines quoted by Coleridge illustrate the misuse of the figure. A poet means to say, regarding an absent friend, "I will remember thee;" but this is simple prose, and he turns it, he thinks, into poetry by writing:

"Thy image on her wing
Before my Fancy's eye shall Memory bring."

Here both Fancy and Memory are made to be living beings. Memory is a winged creature of some kind, and takes on her back the bust or picture of the friend, flies through the air, and sets it down before Fancy, and Fancy looks at it. To be sure, not all cases of personification were so bad as this; but many, when analysed, involved some absurdity. Even the following familiar line of Gray is open to doubt. He means to say that a certain person, under more favourable circumstances, might have become a great poet, but what he does say is that, under more favourable circumstances, he might have "waked to ecstasy the living lyre." Here the lyre is supposed to be a living creature, and to be asleep and very difficult to awaken, but this person could have awakened it and put it into a state of ecstatic delight. But what is the use of this?

(6) Another consequence drawn from the classical conception of the dignity of poetry, was the belief that only great events and great persons, or at least high society and city life, could supply events and persons worthy or capable of poetical treatment. The lives of common people, "humble and rustic life," were regarded as "low and mean," and to be avoided as barren and meaningless. This also drew a strong protest from Wordsworth.

(7) But what perhaps most of all excited Wordsworth's dissatisfaction with the literature

of the century, was the to him superficial view which it seemed to take, of the world of nature and life. The poets of that period thought and wrote about nature as if it were nothing more than lifeless machinery. Thomson and his followers could describe the outward appearances of earth and air, but their descriptions were little more than catalogues of appearances, as if the things had no meanings to their minds, and suggested no thoughts of anything beyond themselves—

A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to them.
And it was nothing more

But these things filled Wordsworth's mind with an overpowering consciousness of the mysterious agencies at work in them, and wonder and speculation as to their meaning and purpose, and their relation to the purpose and destiny of man. The feeling that the world is full of life made him feel at home in the world; the mechanical theory of a lifeless nature oppressed him with a feeling of solitude, and made him think he would be happier if he could go back to the child-like superstitions of the ancient Greeks (like Keats), and fancy a spiritual being in every grove—

"Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan, suckled in a creed outworn,

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less
forlorn :
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn "

The result of these influences taken together was that, as the period advanced, poetry became limited more and more in style, range, variety and originality, and some began to think even that poetry was going out of date and must die out altogether soon (see arguments of Peacock, Hazlitt and Macaulay, and Shelley's reply in "Defence of Poetry") The period produced however two original poets, viz., Burns and Blake, to whom Wordsworth's criticisms do not apply. The latter expressed his sense of the decay of poetry in his poem "To the Muses" (1785) (exposing the weakness of the period, however, in the style of personification and metaphor characteristic of the period) :

The Preface.

Wordsworth and Coleridge, though both had written their earliest poems somewhat in the style of the period, soon began to understand its defects, and to see the need of a new beginning. They ascribed the decay of poetry to the prevailing theories regarding the nature of poetry and poetic diction, and in 1797 joined in producing a small volume of poems on a new

class of subjects and in a new style of thought and diction, and called it *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). The little book was so new in style that it was generally denounced as violating all the established rules and precedents of poetry. Wordsworth supplied a preface in 1800, in which he explained and defended his poetical principles. The book was the beginning of a new school of poetry, though certain questions raised in it are debated still by some.

Purpose of the Preface.

§ 1. The *Lyrical Ballads* was written as an experiment to try whether poems written on a new class of subjects, in a new style of composition, and in a new vein of thought, would be acceptable to the public of that time most of the poems being on events of common life and expressed in such language as was "really used by men," and therefore widely different from the fashionable poetry of the period.

§ 2. The poems were understood and appreciated by a few as making a new beginning and opening up a new world to poetry; but were despised by the general public, and denounced by professional critics as contravening all the established rules of poetry, and almost beneath contempt.

§ 3. Some friends advised him to write "a systematic defence of the theory on which his

poems were written"; but he felt, that he could not do that without entering philosophically into the theory of poetry, and into a critical examination of the poetry popular at the time, and of the state of public taste. But this would have required a more extensive and laborious work than he was able to undertake. Yet he feels that that he should not "obtrude on the public, poems so materially different from those on which general approbation is at present bestowed without some explanation and defence," and for this purpose he thinks it sufficient to write a short preface.]

§ 4. He admits that when an author offers a new volume of poems to the public, the public naturally expect to find in it such subjects, ideas, and forms of expression as they have been accustomed to find in other poets of their time; and that his own work will cause disappointment in this respect. "Those who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers," and have been taught to think that poetry consists just in the use of language of that kind, may think that they have been induced to buy as poetry a book that is not poetry at all.]

Defence of the Lyrical Ballads.

§ 5. Now his *Lyrical Ballads* differ from other poems of the time mainly in the following

points.—He had (A) "chosen incidents and situations from common life," or "humble and rustic life," (B) and had endeavoured "to relate or describe them throughout in a selection of language really used by men," and (C) had tried to make them materials for poetry by "throwing over them a certain colouring of imagination." What does he mean by these innovations, and how does he justify them?

A

Is "humble life" a fit subject for poetry?

1. He had deliberately chosen incidents and situations from "humble life" as the subjects of most of his poems contained in that collection. The common people from whom he had taken most of his subjects were the people living in the district in which he himself had spent most of his life *viz.*, the Lake district of Cumberland (whence the "Lake School"). But the choice of such subjects had exposed him to much ridicule on the part of his critics. Hence the need of explanation. Was he right in taking up such subjects? Was Coleridge's criticism justifiable?

Now the reason why he had chosen subjects so often from "humble and rustic life," was because "in that condition the essential passions

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of the human heart find a better soil in which they can attain maturity." How does he prove this?

A distinction is here implied (and everywhere in Wordsworth) between the *natural* life of human beings, and an *artificial* life. "Humble and rustic" people continue to live, in the main, the *natural* life, or life which nature intended and fitted them for. The tendency of thought, feeling and conduct which nature planted in their constitution at birth is in them left unchanged, and continues to predominate through their lives; and their habits, customs and manners are such as rise naturally out of these impulses planted in them by nature. In this form of life mankind remains nearer to the source from which it draws its origin, *viz.*, nature; and still retains most of what was bestowed on it by nature; and is therefore nearer to the ultimate source of both nature and man, *viz.*, Deity (see poem on *Childhood*, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy"). It is in life of this kind, therefore, that men generally attain their healthiest development morally as well as physically, and their happiest condition socially (Rousseau), whatever the common opinion may be.

But poets had considered the life of such "humble and rustic people" as altogether beneath the notice of poetry (except perhaps for burlesque

situations). Wordsworth considers it a legitimate sphere for poetry, or even as the best field, and one from which to draw the deepest poetical thought and feeling.

The life of cities and fashionable life, on the contrary, is largely an *artificial* life. There the impulses and instincts implanted by nature and those rising naturally out of them, have become more or less stifled by an overgrowth of habits, manners and customs, which rise, not directly out of nature, but out of the new circumstances in which men have placed themselves in the development of society and city life. And out of the new circumstances which men have created for themselves arise competition between strong and weak, inequalities of wealth, poverty, misery and crime, and all the vices of city life. These evils have been made mainly by men themselves, when they departed from the natural impulses and instincts which nature gave them, and created an artificial social system of their own. Men have made themselves to be what they are. See the poem, "Lines written in Early Spring" where he finds nature to be full of joyous feeling—"every flower enjoys the air it breathes,"—and contrasts the joyousness of nature made by God "with what man has made of man."

From this it follows that Wordsworth believed, with Plato and Rousseau, in "the

descent of man" (in the literal sense of the word) from a higher to a lower state,—from nearness to nature and Deity to remoteness. He found this decline from a higher to a lower state both in the life of the race, *viz.*, from the state in which nature placed it to that which man has made for himself, and also, as we find elsewhere, in that of the individual, from the state of nearness to heaven in which he still is in childhood ("Heaven lies about us in our infancy") to the remoteness of the man: "for yet I know, where'er I go, that there hath passed away a glory from the earth" (opposed, of course, to the modern scientific doctrine, which is the doctrine rather of an "ascent of man" from animality to reason).

It should be noticed that, though Wordsworth is here merely explaining why some of the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* deal with "humble and rustic life," Coleridge and many other critics have assumed that he is here teaching that all poetry should deal with "humble (Coleridge even makes him say *low*) and rustic life," which is certainly very far from the truth. All that he says is, that humble and rustic life is a legitimate source of poetic thought and feeling. But he himself gives examples in the book, of poems of an altogether different order, and as lofty in thought and style as any in the language.

But is "the language really used by men" a fit language for poetry?

Further, he has written his *Lyrical Ballads*, as far as possible, "in a selection of language really used by men" that is to say, he avoids the artificial "poetic diction" of his time. What is his meaning here? Was Coleridge's criticism of his use of common language justifiable? What is "poetic diction?"

A belief had become general during that century, that poetry, to be poetry, must be written in a style and language different from those of prose and common intercourse. A poet must not express common things in common ways, prose does that; poetry must have a diction of its own. The ordinary names of things are prosaic because ordinary; the poet must find less common words for things, or he must indicate the things in descriptive periphrases. Particular facts when taken just as they are, are prosaic, high-sounding generalisations are more poetical. Personifications and parallel statements, and phrases repeated from the ancient classics (as allusions to the Muses, to Parnassus, Helicon, Pegasus and the like) were thought necessary to the making of poetry.

Thus a peculiar style of expression became prevalent consisting of peculiar words and

phrases, circumlocutions and generalisations, figures and allusions—and was considered the proper diction of poetry, if not poetry itself. In its extreme forms it was admired and praised as "splendour of diction:" Wordsworth calls it "gaudy and inane phraseology," and "takes as great pains to avoid it in his poems as others to attain it."

This round-about method of expression in which the real facts and truths, where there were any, were concealed under clouds of vague verbiage, is well seen in the early poems of Pope, such as his *Pastorals* and *Messiah* and *Windsor Forest* (though his later works are distinguished for their terse and pointed style). Johnson seems to have reduced "splendour of diction" to an art in both prose and verse, and towards the end of the century, poetry came to consist largely of "poetical" phraseology (as Coleridge says, "the language of poetry without the poetry itself)."

Coleridge nevertheless opposes (to some extent) Wordsworth's teaching on the subject of poetic diction, he himself having made much use of it in his own early poems. And he accuses Wordsworth of falling into fallacy in his use of the phrase "the real language of men." There are different classes of real men, sailors, shepherds, country people and town's people, uneducated and educated. But

they all speak in styles of language peculiar to themselves; and they are all "real men," and their various dialects are dialects of real men. Which of these classes then are the "real men," whose speech, Wordsworth thinks, should be used in all poetry?

Wordsworth (§ 5) had defended his use of the style of "humble and rustic people" in some of his poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge and other critics following him, think that he thereby (*a*) assumes the language of "humble and rustic people" to be the only "real language of men," and (*b*) therefore teaches that all poetry should be composed in the language of these people, and (*c*) that Wordsworth, in departing from this style in his higher poems, thereby contradicts his own teaching, finding it impracticable. But is there any ground for these charges?

What then does he really mean by the phrases "the real language of man," and "really used by men," which Coleridge finds so perplexing? Wordsworth himself makes this clear enough in §§ 21-2. The poet may speak in either of two ways. (1) He may "speak through the mouths of his characters" (*i.e.*, dramatically). What language then should he use in such cases? All agree that he should make his other persons utter such thoughts and feelings as are natural to them, and express them in

such language and style as they would naturally use—making sailors speak like sailors, shepherds like shepherds, educated people like other people of that class, and so on. Now these are "real men" and in making them speak thus, the poet will be using "the language of real men" No one goes so far as to say that he should make other persons talk "poetic diction"

Or (2) he may "speak to us in his own person and character" expressing directly his own thoughts and feelings What sort of language then should he use here? Wordsworth says that a poet when speaking in his own character, should speak his own language His critics say no, when speaking for himself, he should speak *poetic* diction But Wordsworth cannot see why he should not here also use "the language of real men," which in this case will mean the speech natural to the poet himself and others like him Critics admit that in making others speak (dramatically), he should make them speak like themselves, but in speaking for himself, critics say, he should not speak like himself he must speak an artificial dialect. But Wordsworth protests. "The poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions; why then should his language differ from that of other men who think and feel in the same way?" if he can express his thoughts as well in this natural way as in any other?

Neither Coleridge nor his followers have answered this question. There is one way in which it might be approached. Wordsworth says that poetry is the expression of thought and feeling. The purpose of the poet is to express them in the best way possible. It will follow that if he can express them better by using poetic diction than by "the language really spoken by men," then on his own principles, it is his duty to use poetic diction. This certainly is so. But Wordsworth has himself met this suggestion in § 10 and elsewhere, the best passages of every great poem are expressed in language as simple and common as that of prose, and evidently the natural language of the poet himself. Therefore artificial language is unnecessary.)

We can now see the *general principle* underlying his teaching with regard to the language of poetry. As poetry consists in the expression of certain kinds of thought and feeling, the best way of expressing them is that which will make them reach the mind in the simplest and most direct way,—without being weakened by intermixture with anything foreign and irrelevant. The depth and intensity of thought in which the sublime consists, can be conveyed only by the simplest words. Ornamental language turns thought aside and weakens the impression. And the simplest and most direct language will certainly

be that which comes most naturally to writer and reader. And this will be "language really used by men." When the poet is speaking in his own person, the "real men" whose language should be used, will be the poet himself and those to whom he "addresses himself." When he makes others speak (dramatically) he will make them also speak in the style natural to them-rustics like rustics, etc

[Wordsworth himself however uses the word "generally," meaning that his principle need not be taken to exclude cases in which the best possible expression may require words or phrases different from common language, as is often the case in the later plays of Shakespeare, in Milton, and sometimes (though rarely) in Wordsworth himself.] Nevertheless, he reminds us that the greater part of all poems, and nearly all the best passages in poetry, are composed in language not essentially different from that of good prose and common life

C

"A colouring of imagination"

But while describing things in language really used by men, he has "tried to throw over them, a certain colouring of imagination, whereby things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect," and "to trace in them truly

though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature."

Wordsworth here indicates casually what was to be the fundamental purpose of his own poetry. He was to deal often with common things, but he was to find deep meanings suggested everywhere—even "in the bare trees and mountains bare and grass in the green field." And his spiritual theory of the world was to give a significance to things around him to which others were insensible. For the poet is by nature a *seer*,—to him things are surrounded by "a light that never was on sea or land," and he has "moments of visitation from the most High God" in which "he can see into the life of things." And as a poet he is distinguished from other seers in these ways: (1) he is endowed with power of imagination; that is, of embodying the truths which he sees, in concrete images or pictures, in which others can see what the poet sees, and thereby feel what he feels. Thus he can make common things interesting by making people see them in the light of new and unsuspected meanings, making the commonest thing to be a spring and centre of thought and feeling —a revelation of an infinite reality beyond—of the supernatural in the natural.

And finally (2) he can make common actions interesting by tracing in them "the primary laws of our nature" that is, showing that they are

not stories constructed artificially for amusement, but rise naturally out of the depths of human life and character, and therefore a revelation of truth

§ 6. *Charges against Wordsworth's Poetry*

Wordsworth "cannot remain insensible to the present outcry against the charges of triviality and meanness both of thought and language" which had been made against his poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*. These charges were made practically against all the poems. Those most open to them were those of dramatic form, in which rustic people are made to speak in their own style; or those in which the poet is speaking about such people, and semi-dramatically assumes, playfully to some extent, their style and speech. As applied to the more serious poems such as *Tintern Abbey* the charge only evinced culpable lack of understanding. How does he deal, then, with these charges?

(a) As regards the charge of "trivial thought," he thinks that the charge has been advanced without due reflection. Every one of his poems has "a worthy *purpose*." A poet is one who thinks and feels more deeply than other men. Every poem is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and the feeling rises out of what the poet sees and thinks, and his purpose is to convey the same feeling and thought to other minds. And where the fundamental

thought and feeling is a worthy one, nothing but good can come of such communication—the minds of readers are lifted above vulgar things, and habituated to elevated thought and feeling. This he claims is true of his poems in the *Ballads* and therefore, when rightly understood, they will be found not to be trivial.]

§ 7-8 "Another circumstance distinguishes his poems from the popular poetry of the day." In his poems, it is the thought and feeling developed in them that gives interest and importance to the story; it is not the story that gives interest to the poem. That is, the interest lies not in the story by itself, but chiefly in the meaning. His purpose is not to excite his readers by "gross and violent stimulants," but to show them what is deep, wonderful and interesting even in common things. And he complains that people had acquired such a "thirst for outrageous stimulation" in literature, that they could no longer use their thinking power, and could only brood over what is exciting sensational and horrible. This tendency may have had its root in the exciting and terrible political events to which they had been accustomed for the past decade—the events following on the revolution in France—and a sensational literature had sprung up to satisfy that craving. "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German

tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse." It was not to be wondered at therefore, that they no longer had any ear for such poems as his.

Wordsworth is here thinking evidently of the first crude attempts made in literature to meet that change in public taste commonly called the Romantic movement, the general dissatisfaction with the monotony, formality and tameness of 18th century literature. In the absence of any original genius, these attempts had taken the form of ghost stories and thrilling tragedies- the school of horror against which Jane Austen and other realists protested. Coleridge took advantage of this taste however to write a ghost story himself, *viz.*, the *Ancient Mariner*, but it was one with a deep meaning. Wordsworth who disliked all such departures from truth of real life, thought that the same feeling of mystery might be produced by a story of real life, and about the same time wrote his unsuccessful story of *Peter Bell*, in which he tries to make a story of common life produce the same feeling of mystery which others produced by these stories of ghosts ("Brutus will start a ghost as soon as Caesar"). He himself indeed took up the supernatural, but in a different sense to him the supernatural was *in* the natural giving to romantic spiritualism a new direction, *viz.*, that of transcendental thought.

§ 9. (*b*) As regards the charge of triviality of *style and language*, this brings back the question of "poetic diction" Wordsworth says that he has always "looked steadily at his subject," thereby to see it clearly as it is, with the meanings and suggestions contained in it, and has sought always to express them in the simplest and most natural phraseology; and in so doing, to avoid all exaggeration and all merely ornamental verbiage which would give a false appearance to things; and give to prose thought the appearance of being poetry. This principle of simplicity and truth had made him avoid "almost entirely what is usually called poetic diction" Hence it has cut him off from a "large portion of the figures of speech which have long been regarded as the common inheritance of poets," and which had been, repeated by poet after poet, as if poetry had been impossible without them. Thus amongst these artifices of poets, he had generally avoided the personification of abstract ideas, which had been made so much use of by 18th century poets; and which though sometimes used with good effect, had more frequently been merely "an ordinary device to give an appearance of elevation to the style, and raise it above prose." His purpose has been to bring the language of poetry back as near as possible to the real language of men; and he has hoped to create interest

by the thought which he has put into his poems, and not by ornamental verbiage

§ § 10-11 It seemed to be accepted as a "canon of criticism" at the time, that no composition could be accepted as poetry unless the words and phrases used in it, differed essentially from those used in prose Against this, he points out that great part of every poem, and especially the best passages in every poem, are expressed in language essentially identical with that of prose when well written. In confirmation of this he quotes the sonnet of Gray, and points out that the only lines in it of any value are in the language of prose, and that those in poetic diction are worthless Thus Gray, instead of saying that day is dawning, says that "Redd'ning Phœbus lifts his golden fire," which means that the light of morning is produced by some one called Phœbus, who lifts up a panful of brands which burn with a yellow flame, and the yellow flame makes the face of Phœbus red. But surely such "poetic diction" is worthless.

Theory of poetical language in general.

§ 12. What he has said hitherto has been intended mainly as explanation and justification of the language and style of the *Lyrical Ballads*. He has laid down, however, the general principle that poetry should be written in such language as is really used by men The men with whom he

has dealt in the *Ballads* have been "humble and rustic people"; and he has applied his principle by making them speak in a selection of language such as might be understood and used among themselves. He does not indeed say that rustics and humble people are "all men," or that all poetry should be written in their dialect (which Coleridge and many critics practically accuse him of doing). Therefore he now puts his principle in a more general form. The language "really used by men" is prose language; and if it may be safely affirmed as a principle that "there neither is nor can be any *essential* difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition."

They differ in this, no doubt, that poetry is usually (though not necessarily) composed in metre; and that the poet must select and arrange his words more carefully and skilfully than is necessary in prose—with a view to bring out finer shades of meaning and harmony—but such differences do not involve any essential difference in the language used. Arbitrarily selected words (such as 'swain' for man, 'nymph' for woman) and unnecessary periphrases and figures and allusions may add nothing to the meaning, and usually are nothing but artifices to make prose appear to be poetry—making trivial ideas seem to be important ones. Natural language is sufficient to express all that

the poet needs to express He expresses his own thoughts and feelings, and the poet's thoughts and feelings are essentially the same in kind as those of other men, and do not require another language to express them. The poet may shed tears, but his tears are 'not such tears as angels weep" (Milton), requiring an angelic language to give them expression; they are natural human tears, and human language is enough for them. His blood is not any celestial 'ichor' like that of the gods (in Homer), producing thought and passion which only a "language of the gods" could express. His blood is the same as that of other men, and there can be nothing in his mind which cannot be expressed by the language of other men.

§ 13. It is pointed out, however, that the poet usually writes in metre, and often in rhyme, and that these by themselves make an important difference between poetry and prose; and, further, that the poet in order to obtain metre and rhymes will often be compelled to use words and phrases, and orders of words, which would be out of place in prose. The answer is that metre serves a purpose of its own; and that to a good poet, it necessitates no essential difference in the words used—to him, the words will flow on as naturally and easily in metre as in prose; only bad poets have to indulge in

contortions of language in order to produce metre (thus one of the poetical gifts of Byron is the natural flow of his words, even in difficult metres such as the Spenserian and octave).

Indeed the real poet will find in the language "really spoken by men" and used by them in well written prose (avoiding vulgarity and coarseness), all that he needs for expression of his thought and feeling, for metre, for dignity of style, and for descriptive metaphor and all the other figures needed in poetry.

§ 14. It may be supposed that the above principle as to the language of poetry is of no great practical importance—that great poets do not use artificial poetic diction to such an extent as to make any very great difference to the value of their poetry. Wordsworth himself thinks, however, that if these principles be accepted, their acceptance will make a very great difference to our judgment of what is best in poetry, both ancient and modern. He thinks it necessary, therefore, to justify his principles by entering farther into the nature of poetry and the function of the poet in general.

Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry.

§ 15-16. "Taking up the subject, then, on general grounds, let me ask, What is a poet? To whom does he address himself? What language

is to be expected from him"? The answer is:—

A poet is a man in all essentials like other men. He speaks to other men just like himself. Therefore he will naturally speak the language common to himself and the men to whom he speaks.

But all men are not poets. What then makes a man to be a poet? The poet is distinguished from other men chiefly by these characteristics:—

(*a*) He is endowed with greater power of seeing and thinking than other men; and his intuitions and thoughts are not so much the result of *trying*, as in other men; they rise in his mind more spontaneously, as if by inspiration. And his thinking power is more comprehensive, and takes in a wider range of reality; so that he can picture things past, distant and future, actual and possible, more clearly than other men, and is affected by absent things as if they were present; and he has a deeper insight into human nature than other men, and is interested, above everything, in the feelings and volitions which rise in his own mind and the minds of others, as being the revelations of what is deepest in human nature, -and so much so that he cannot help reading similar feelings into the things in the world round about him (see "Lines in Early Spring") and finding life every where. In the natural he sees the supernatural; behind the physical he sees the spiritual.

(*b*) And further "he is endowed with more ively sensibility, enthusiasm and tenderness han other men"; not only does he see and think, ut what he sees and thinks about, makes deeper mpressions on his mind than on other men, xciting stronger feelings such as wonder, fear, nger, pity and compassion, indignation, gratitude nd the like; and he has more enthusiasm to ommunicate what he sees thinks and feels to ther men, and to rouse in them the same feelings of wonder, gratitude, pity and the like, and the actions to which such feelings lead, and by thus affecting the mind of men, a great poet makes himself to be a power in the world and generally for good.

(*c*) But he has to be endowed also, with greater power of expression than other men This is the most distinctive character in the poet; without this he would be but "a mute inglorious Milton" For poetry is an expression of thought and truth It agrees thus far with cience. But it expresses truth not wholly for ruth's own sake as science does, but truth in so ar as it touches directly human feeling, and it xpresses it not by abstraction but by making t visible to the mind's eye in imagery, and with uch colour and harmony as to touch the feelings The poet has the power of seeing this kind of ruth and expressing it in concrete imagery, nd it is this mainly that makes him to be a poet.

From the above, then, we can see *how a poem is composed*. Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." § 25.

The poet observes and thinks more deeply than other men, and what he sees and thinks excites deeper feelings in his mind and he writes guided by thought, but under the impulse of feeling. What he sees, however exciting to him it may be, is excluded for the moment from his mind by the crowd of other impressions, but it has sunk deep into his mind, and in a time of leisure revives in memory, flashes on his inward eye, and revives the feeling connected with it (joy, wonder, anger and the like). His feeling impels him to give full expression to the idea out of which it rises, and communicate it to others. Until this is done, he cannot rest. He is like the ancient prophet who felt that he had a message to deliver, and felt it a burden on his mind until delivered. Or he feels like the Ancient Mariner, who had no peace until he had told his story. It is so with the really great poet. He writes not to amuse himself but because he has something to say, a message to deliver. Under this impulse, therefore, the fundamental idea works itself out into a system of related ideas, and expresses them in words. And at last, when the original idea and feeling has

ound that full expression and elaboration by which it may be communicated to other minds he poet is satisfied When Wordsworth sees he daffodils waving their heads by the side of the lake, or Shelley hears the lark singing invisible in the sky, or Keats hears the nightingale, he is deeply impressed, but for the moment only other experiences suppress his feeling for the time being But it has taken deep root in his sensitive mind, and in solitude it comes to life again and expands into a poem How this process may be analysed thus

(1) There is first, the something seen or heard which excites the poet's feeling strongly and which may be excluded at the moment of being experienced, but which fixes itself in his memory and revives when the distractions are removed But the revived idea is incomplete At first, like a germ in the soil In his mind there is an irresistible impulse to give it full expression by reviving associated ideas, and combining them all together into one whole thought and feeling, in which the whole content and meaning of the fundamental idea will be fully expressed, as the life of the germ is fully expanded in the plant.

(2) But thought and feeling by themselves are but "airy nothings," and incommunicable to other persons Therefore the impulse to give the idea and feeling full expression, is

accompanied by an impulse to fix them, and give them physical existence (so to speak) by putting them into suitable words, in which their whole meaning will be embodied and made permanent and communicable. And poetical expression of truth differs from scientific in this: in the poet's mind, thought spontaneously evolves and embodies itself in concrete images or pictures,—descriptions, incidents, metaphors, with meanings in them which can be *seen*, and do not need to be inferred. Poetry is thought in pictures. Science, thought in abstract notions and propositions.

It follows from the above that a poem is not *made* but *grows*. The poet does not really *make* it. Shelley scoffs at the idea of making a poem. It evolves itself in the poet's mind as a plant grows in the soil. The "creative" impulse (proceeding from a "something far more deeply interfused" which transcends the poet's mind, being the life of nature itself) enters into the fundamental idea and makes it expand itself into the many subordinate ideas contained in it or associated with it, and makes it attain for itself full expression in the poem as a whole—somewhat as the life of nature enters into the germ and makes it unfold itself into stem, branches, leaves and flowers.

Whence then does the "creative" impulse come? Does it come from nothing deeper than

the poet's own sub-conscious mind? Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley think that it has a deeper source than that—that it comes from the life of nature—from a 'something far more deeply interfused.' The soul can "feed itself in a wise passiveness," *i.e.*, in receiving impulses from a deeper power. "One impulse from a vernal wood" may reveal to the poet more than "all the sages can." In other words, poetry is natural inspiration, not art. The same power which evolves things in nature below, rises up into the poet's mind, and evolves ideas there.

Homer *Romantic* in the proper sense of the word, and as understood by Schlegel and German Romanticists. (1) Great poetry must be spontaneous and sincere, and to be that, it must be an expression of the poet's own time and people. It is the 'time-spirit,' as it were, that enters into him and makes him to be its own voice, so that he writes not by art of his own but by inspiration of his time and circumstances. Thus Homer because he gave sincere and natural expression to the mind of primitive Greece, and Dante and Milton who did the same for Catholic Italy and Puritan England, were truer poets than Virgil and Tasso, who tried to re-construct past times of which they knew little, and therefore produced artificial work, and were for that reason inferior as poets, however great their art

(2) The inspiration which comes, as thus assumed, from the inner life of nature, brings with it a conviction that behind the outward appearances of things there is a depth of mysterious power, and therefore of wonders and mysteries from which the imagination of the poet can freely draw, and in which they can escape from the platitudes of actual life Hence this new movement in poetry, so strongly opposed to the mechanism of the 18th century, has been called a "renascence of wonder"

(3) But this fundamental character of Romanticism carries with it certain other characters as consequences The thought which thus comes spontaneously finds words spontaneously, and these will be the words which come first and most naturally to the mind of the poet, and these will be the language made familiar by daily use the real language spoken by himself and his fellows, and not any artificial diction.

(4) And the deep truths of nature will manifest themselves as much in the natural lives of the "humble" as in those of the high and mighty.

Thus romanticism was essentially a conviction of transcendental powers working in and revealing themselves in the outward phenomena of nature and life, and entering into, and influencing the mind of the poet, and making

true poetry to be a product of inspiration more than of art, making it to grow spontaneously in the poet's mind rather than to be *made* by the poet and giving preference to natural language and natural life. This has been called "romantic" as having much in common with the spirit of the literature of the Romance or Romanic languages (13th and 14th centuries). The word has come to be used very loosely, however, and with meanings which have no natural or historical connection. But it was essentially a reaction against the mechanical philosophy of the 18th century, which tended to reduce nature to lifeless machinery, and human thought to the calculation of practical interest and utility. Hence the mistake of treating the descriptive poets of the 18th century (Thomson and his school) as if they were romanticists. Generally speaking, these poets see only the outside of things, and hardly do more than catalogue their external appearances. They have little or no feeling for the depth, wonder, mystery, and spiritual suggestiveness of nature which is the mark of Romanticism. Lessing was thinking of this school when he deprecated descriptive poetry as a vain attempt to do with words, what only painters could do with colours. But some anticipation of true romantic feeling and insight is met with in Collins, Chatterton, and more especially, Blake.

§§ 17-18. Nevertheless Wordsworth admits that "however exalted an idea we may cherish of the character of a poet," the reality will never come up altogether to the ideal, that is, the inspiration of nature will never be exhaustive, and in his work there will generally be something that is "mechanical" and artificial. This is seen especially in the dramatic part of his work, *i.e.*, in expressing the feelings of other minds. To give spontaneous expression to the feelings of others, he would have to reproduce them with exactitude in his own mind. This he may be unable to do (unless he is a dramatist of the highest power). Therefore he will be unable to obtain language so exquisitely fitted for the feeling "as that in which real passion expresses itself." His expression will have something artificial in it. He will be somewhat in the position of a translator who has thought and feeling supplied to him by his original but has to find for himself the best words to express them in. This mechanical element will coincide with what Coleridge calls "secondary imagination," or the element of art which the poet has to supply by effort of his own will, to supplement the impulses which come from nature, and to mould them into a unitary whole. Shelley, on the contrary, seems to depreciate everything of the nature of art in poetry, and to ascribe the whole to nature. Increased regard for the artistic

element in poetry is what mainly distinguishes the "Victorian School" of poetry from the earlier Romantic.

Hence Wordsworth's theory of poetry includes his theory of the relation of poetry to science.

Poetry and Science.

§§ 19, 20. Poetry is essentially a revelation of truth. But science also is a revelation of truth. Therefore we have to distinguish between science and poetry.

It is often said in depreciation of poetry that it is only a means of producing pleasure. But science also produces pleasure. They both produce that kind of pleasure which consists in *knowing*—poetry and science *agree* in producing the pleasure of knowledge. But if they agree in producing knowledge, in what respects do they differ? The difference between them, then, will have regard to the kind of truth which they reveal or knowledge which they give. Thus—

(*a*) They differ in the way in which they obtain the knowledge which they give—the truth which they reveal;

(*b*) They differ in the way in which they give expression to the knowledge which they convey;

(*c*) They differ also in the kinds of pleasurable feeling to which they give rise Hence—

(*a*)

As to the ways in which they obtain their knowledge of truth Science begins with concrete things as they present themselves in experience, and proceeds by analysis, generalisation and inference taking things to pieces and reaching back from what is individual to what is universal -to substances, laws and abstract notions thus proceeding, in the main, from the concrete and individual to the abstract and universal. Its methods therefore are analysis and inference.

The poet, on the contrary, does not *analyse* nor *infer*, he *sees* with the power of intuitive insight given him by nature he casts his sight "through earth and sea and air," and sees deep truths of nature and life, the relations, reasons and consequences of things –in his moments of "inspiration from the most high God, he sees into the heart of things." And what he sees in nature and life, fills his mind with feelings of wonder, gratitude, hope, fear, indignation, pity and the like ; and what he sees and feels is a burden on his mind until he has expressed it fully in words, and made it permanently accessible to other minds

For the truths which poetry deals with, *viz*, those which touch human feelings, are truths which can be *seen* and *felt* intuitively, without inference—as soon as the circumstances are presented; and the method of poetry is not to enable us to *infer* truths as a scientific treatise does, but to make us *see* them ourselves, with the mind's eye, *viz*, as embodied in concrete imagery.

(*b*)

As to the ways in which they express and communicate truth. As science reduces the world of concrete things to a world of abstract laws, so it describes its world of abstractions in abstract ideas and general propositions, and reduces these, wherever possible, to mathematical formulæ. In short, it speaks in abstractions.

Poetry proceeds in the opposite way. It seizes on thoughts and feelings in themselves vague and intangible, and embodies them in concrete images or pictures—descriptions and metaphors—in which they can be *seen* by the mind's eye, reflected or expressed as soul is expressed in body. A poem is made to be a living organism, the meaning, *i.e.*, the generic idea which expands itself into the poem, is, as it were, the soul of the organism, and in this organism we can see the meaning as we "see the soul's

construction in the face" Thus, while science tries to reduce thought more and more completely to abstractions and formulæ, poetry tries to speak more and more in pictures, in which the meaning can be seen by the mind's eye without analysis or inference. Its faculty is not understanding, but imagination, or power of reducing abstract thought to concrete imagery (See Imagination and Fancy)

(*c*)

As to the kind of truth which they reveal, science regards things as they are by themselves, and apart from all regard for human interests and feelings; and values truth for its own sake, whatever bearing it may have on human feeling and fate.

Poetry rises out of the interest which men feel in the destiny of mankind, and takes for its sphere those truths, or aspects of truth, which have most direct bearing on human wellbeing, and touch most directly human feelings It is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and the feelings spring out of what is known or thought about those things which touch most closely the interestsand destiny of men (fear, hope, pity, anger, etc.). Real feelings rise out of things known to be real, and weaker feelings, out of things known only to be possible—which is poetry of Imagination. And there is a kind of poetry

which gives pleasure by merely picturing things which might be, and conceiving faintly the feelings which, if they were real, they would produce—which is poetry of Fancy.

Thus the things or ideas of things which rise into poetry are those which do, or may, or might affect the welfare and touch the feelings of men.

Hence there is no opposition between science and poetry except in method. Both reveal truth. Indeed "poetry is the breath and finer spirit that is in all knowledge"—that is, to us the innermost essence of all truth is that element of truth which affects most directly our well-being and touches our feelings, and it is this aspect of truth that the poet sees and reveals to others in his pictorial imagery. It is therefore "the impassioned expression which is on the face of all science"—that is, if science be personified as a genius or goddess who knows and reveals truth to mankind, and at the same time feels sympathy with men, then her face will wear an impassioned expression of pity or gladness, according as the truths which she has to reveal are good or bad for men (one of the rare personifications made by Wordsworth). Poetry is a translation into words of this expression of the goddess.

It follows from this relation of poetry to science that poetry cannot die out (as Peacock,

Hazlitt, Macaulay and others were inclined to think) It must live as long as science itself For the whole world stands in relation to humanity, and every new truth that science can reveal will have some bearing on the well-being and destiny of men, and will therefore touch human feeling, and supply material for poetry When once their bearing on the innermost system of the world comes to be understood, and thereby their connection with the destiny of man comes to be seen, "when they come to put on a form of flesh and blood," then "the remotest discoveries of the chemist, botanist and mineralogist, not to speak of astronomer and geologist, will be found to be proper objects of the poet's art."

Hence the error of those who imagine that there is a contradiction between science and poetry, and that the advance of science must ultimately abolish poetry. Such an idea is founded on a wrong conception of the nature and function of poetry. They assume that all poetry is, like that of Homer and the mediæval romances - founded on belief in the actual existence of gods and goddesses, fairies, demons, angels and devils, overlooking and taking part in the affairs of men. But science is irresistibly undermining and destroying such beliefs. Therefore it is taking away all foundation for poetry. But Wordsworth shows how poetry can be based

on simple truth, and that the advance of science can only reveal deeper and deeper truths, and widen the realm of wonder and mystery, and give wider scope for human thought and feeling Poetry is founded on knowledge "it is the first and last of all knowledge; it is immortal as the heart of man"

§§ 21, 22. Thisdigression regarding the nature of poetry brings back again the old question as to the proper language for poetry If poetry is the spontaneous expression of thought and feeling, then the best language for poetry must be that in which thought and feeling most spontaneously embody themselves And that will be the language which comes most directly and naturally to the poet and his readers, and that again will be the language which is common to both, and therefore the language really used by the class of men to which they belong a "language really spoken by men" Such spontaneous flow of thought and feeling cannot be supposed "to deviate from the real language of nature." "The poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions," which are common to all men, "why should his language in any material degree differ from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly" Poetry by its very nature is inconsistent with any artificial language such as "poetic diction"

Why does the poet write in verse?

§§ 22, 23, 24. But if the poet is to confine himself as far as possible to the language of prose and common intercourse, why should he depart so far from that style as to write in verse. Is not this a contradiction of his principle? Surely verse involves a wide departure from prose. The answer is that, so far as the language used is concerned, it does not. And further, verse serves a purpose of its own, which has nothing to do with "poetic diction." What then is the use of metre and verse?

Poetry aims at the perfect expression of thought and feeling. The principal means of expressing thought and feeling is by language. But there is yet another means. Music expresses thought to some extent and feeling to a very high degree. Therefore the expressive power of poetry will be greatly increased if we can combine music with poetry. This is done in song, where the accompanying air greatly increases the emotional effect of the poem. But in the case of song and instrumental accompaniments, the music is added on to the poetry from the outside, and artificially. The effect will be better if the music can be drawn out of the poem itself, that is, if the poem itself can be made musical, and the music of the words can be made to increase the expressive power of the words themselves. This is accomplished

to some extent in metre and versification These are the art of making words musical, or of bringing out the music which is in them The sound is thereby made to be "an echo to the sense." Thus metre, being a power of expression, may be considered an integral part of poetry.

Hence in the best metrical compositions the metre will be made to vary with the feeling expressed in the poem. The most elaborate effort to accomplish fusion of sound and meaning, is seen in the compositions called 'choral odes,' such as Dryden's *St. Cecilia*, Pope's *St. Cecilia*, Grey's *Poesy*, Collins's *The Passions*.

Another effect of metre is often referred to, *viz.*, its calming and soothing effect on the mind. Tragical or pathetic scenes (*e.g.*, in *Othello*) may excite the feelings to a painful degree. The effect is softened by the harmony of the language, and made to be more agreeable than painful. –

Other charges against Wordsworth's poetry.

§§ 26-30. In the earlier parts of the *Preface* he has replied to the principal charges made against the *Lyrical Ballads*. After his long digression on poetry in general, he here turns back to deal with some minor charges. Thus some had accused him of frequently using "words and phrases" which to them seemed

"mean and ludicrous." He admits that sometimes phrases which to himself seemed "tender and pathetic," might to others be suggestive of something ludicrous; but such minor differences of taste are unavoidable. They arise from differences of experience. In one person's experience a word may have become associated with something painful and pathetic, as with sorrow and death, to him, therefore, that word will ever afterwards rouse a feeling of sadness in his mind. To another person, the same may, in his experience, have been connected with something mean or ludicrous; therefore that same feeling will cling to the word ever afterwards. But such differences of association are rare and unimportant; and if the poet were to attach much importance to them, and try to please every one in such matters, all liberty of thought and expression would be lost: (Wordsworth was certainly defective in sense of humour, and this defect led him sometimes to use expressions which to most other people seemed ludicrous. Thus in one of the *Ballads* he had occasion to mention a 'tub.' The theory of poetic diction would exclude such a word simply because a tub is a common thing, without dignified associations. But Wordsworth thought fit to add the explanation: "'Twas one of those that women use to wash their clothes," thus unnecessarily forcing on the attention of the

reader, a cluster of perhaps undigested associations. He afterwards saw this, and removed the phrase.)

§§ 27-31. He complains here of another "false criticism." Some think that a verse composed of such simple words as a child might understand, must for that reason be childish. Johnson criticised the traditional ballads (Percy's *Reliques*) adversely because they contain many verses in simple popular language, and thought to confirm this opinion of his, by composing a verse of his own, in words of the same kind—that people might see how worthless such poetry was. But he forgot that poetry consists in the meaning conveyed, not in the words used. The meaning conveyed by Johnson's parody is nonsensical. The traditional ballads are always full of meaning, however simple the language may be. (See examples quoted by Wordsworth.) Johnson's criticism here illustrates the weakness of his own and much 18th century criticism—the belief that poetry consists largely in the words used—in "splendour of diction," "in long Latinised words in -osity and -ation"—as if the meaning conveyed were a matter of secondary importance.

A new kind of poetry needed

§§ 32-33. He closes with an admission that there will have to be a great change in public

taste and in theory of poetry, before such poetry as he has been recommending, can become popular. Many have derived great pleasure from poetry written with the "splendour of poetic diction" characteristic of the period; and it will be difficult for them ever to appreciate poetry written in the language of real life, and which depends for its interest mainly on the thought conveyed. Nevertheless, he thinks that if they would consider the subject clearly, they would come to see that the principles which he has laid down would lead to poetry of greater variety and deeper meaning, and of more permanent and universal interest, than poetry founded on superficial and transitory fashions such as the classical imitation and poetic diction of 18th century. Accordingly, the poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads* and the criticism of the *Preface* may be regarded as an anticipation of what is deepest and most original in the poetry and criticism of the 19th century.

Origin of "Poetic Diction."

Being anxious to give an exact notion of the sense in which the phrase "poetic diction" has here been used, Wordsworth "adds a few words concerning the origin and character of the phraseology which he has condemned under that name."

"The earlest poets generally wrote from real passion excited by real events." They were witnesses of real events which excited real feelings in their minds and made them think; and their thought and feelings found expression in that language which came to them naturally —*viz.* that really used by themselves and those to whom they spoke. Hence their thought, feelings and words were those of real men, and were natural and sincere. They wrote what they thought and felt, expressing themselves in the words and figures which came to them by nature, and their work was spontaneous and sincere

Later writers were impressed by the effect produced by these earlier writers, and wished to produce the same But they wanted their sincerity and spontaneous inspiration They could make up for this want only in an artificial way. They thought they could produce the same effects by repeating the words, phrases, figures and style of the earlier writers, and by inventing new phrases and figures similar to them. Their thought might be commonplace, their feelings might be affected; but they might give their work the appearance of being high poetry by repeating or imitating the style and phraseology of the great poets.

This practice manifested itself in different ways at different times In England when the power of spontaneous and original thought

which characterised the Elizabethan outburst, began to wane, many second-class writers thought to attain distinction by imitating the artifices of thought and expression into which Italian literature had fallen in its decline. Wearied by the extravagance and obscurity of the "Italianate" style, the poets of the Restoration took to imitating the style of French and Latin writers. Dryden, and afterwards Pope imitated, but generally surpassed their originals. In course of time however, imitation descended to the use of words and phrases, allusions and metaphors, appeals to the Muses and the like (which Coleridge ridicules). The classical or "grand style" was aimed at, but, in the absence of real power was sought by avoiding particular things and facts, and speaking in generalities; common words and phrases were thought mean like common things, and avoided by means of roundabout phrases in sounding words; or might be made to appear poetical by personification with capital initials.

This style was encouraged by the powerful example of Johnson, the literary dictator of the middle century, and became predominant towards the end. Among the longer works in which it is predominant, Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, Rogers's *Pleasures of Memory* and Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope* may be mentioned. Cowper was not altogether free. Some effects

of it can be seen even in Burns and Blake, the most (or only) original poets of the period

The Poetical Faculty Fancy and Imagination.

Imagination (Latin) means literally the making of *images*, but is always restricted to the making of mental images or concrete ideas. Fancy or Phantasy (Greek) means the producing of appearances which have no substantial reality. Therefore, etymologically, the two words mean practically the same thing.

In conversation and literature they have been used with a difference, but only a vague one. Fancy is commonly used for thought of a playful, whimsical and somewhat frivolous kind, having little or no regard to reality. Imagination is used for imagery of a more serious kind, which might possibly correspond to reality.

Wordsworth took up this popular but vague distinction, and deepened it. He made these meanings more definite, and made them correspond to a real difference between two kinds of poetry, which critics had overlooked. Coleridge, following Wordsworth, went deeper still, showing that they have their roots in two distinct needs of mind, leading to two distinct processes of thought, and resulting, as Wordsworth had shown, in two distinct kinds of poetry.

These two kinds of poetry correspond in the main to two different theories of the use, meaning or reason of poetry. (*a*) The theory of "art for art's own sake" (and therefore, of poetry for poetry's own sake), assumes that poetry is something good in itself and for its own sake, and explains the *goodness* for which it is written and read as consisting in its *pleasurableness*, pleasure being assumed to be the one "good in itself." (*b*) The theory that poetry in its highest sense is a revelation of truth, and that its worth and excellence consists in the truth which it reveals and the way in which it reveals it. This theory need not wholly exclude the former one, because it must be admitted that its revelation of truth makes it to be at the same time a source of pleasure. But the pleasure in this case is not sought for its own sake, but rises as consequence out of the attainment of truth.

There will therefore be two kinds of poetry; one kind aiming wholly or mainly at the production of pleasure, considered as something good in itself; and another kind aiming mainly at the communication of truth, the pleasure which rises out of truth being a consequence.

Now these two kinds of poetry will correspond in the main to the functions of Fancy and Imagination (in its restricted sense) as faculties of poetry.

(*a*) Thus Fancy aims directly only at the production of pleasure, and the pleasure at which it aims is that of exercise or play, and the play is play of mind. Most people have more vital power than is used up in the practical work of life. The surplus, if repressed, would be a source of uneasiness; the exercise of it is a source of health and pleasure. This surplus energy may overflow spontaneously in the form of physical play as in games; or it may take the form of mental activity, which will mean playing with ideas. When one is at rest physically, the otherwise unemployed and irrepressible energy of mind finds employment in raising past experiences into consciousness in the form of ideas, and forming them into new combinations—into clusters and trains different from any actually experienced. Thus the surplus activity of mind (guided by the predominant desire) flows on spontaneously from one idea to another (following the line of strongest suggestion and therefore least resistance) producing a current of ideas which streams past before the inward eye; and the self has the pleasure of activity, variety, and novelty without putting forth any effort of its own to produce them; and the pleasure of dwelling for the time being in a new world of its own creation—set free from the troubles of the real world. The spontaneity of the creative process may not always be complete.

More or less effort of will may be needed to arrange the rising ideas into orders and combinations which will suit some purpose; but in really gifted writers, the effort needed will be small (*e.g.* in Keats, Shelley, Scott). Sometimes the result will be little more than a re-arrangement in idea, of things and events actually experienced, as in the descriptive poets of the 18th century, and the realistic novels of Jane Austen; sometimes the result will be so different as to constitute a new world, as in the poetry of Keats and tales of Scott (romanticism).

(Poetry of Fancy, therefore, is not poetry of the highest kind, its purpose being the pleasure of mental play mainly. The child plays physically with toys and in games, but he can play mentally also, as in hearing and reading fairy tales. But poets of the higher kind also, find relaxation in the sphere of Fancy, as Wordsworth in "Poems of Fancy"—"here let me sit and *play* with similes." Keats began with Fancy, as in *Endymion* especially, and *Lamia* ("ever let the Fancy roam, pleasure never is at home,"), but began to rise to graver thought in later poems as in his *Odes* and *Sonnets*.

(*b*) Many critics seemed to see in poetry little beyond the play of Fancy; and to judge a poem mainly by the number of picturesque (picture-like) passages to be found in it (Jeffrey, Hazlitt, Hunt, Macaulay), thinking little of the

underlying thought which belongs to imagination. Many who appreciated Scott, Byron and Keats—poets of Fancy—failed entirely to appreciate Wordsworth a poet of Imagination. But Imagination has a higher function than Fancy. It makes *images*, but not for the purpose of amusement merely. It is an organ of truth. It is a power of seeing truth, and evolving at the same time *imagery* in which it will be expressed, embodied and made visible to the eye of mind, and communicated (with the help of language) from one mind to another.

For according to Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley the highest function of poetry is to express truth, and its organ for the expression of truth is Imagination.) Science expresses truth in abstractions, reached and grasped by reasoning; poetry, in concrete imagery in which it can be seen by the inner eye intuitively. The poet has the power of seeing and feeling truth directly; and is further distinguished by the power of embodying what he sees and feels (so to speak) in concrete pictures, in which others can see and feel them. The power by which he does so is Imagination; and the word (though its literal meaning is image-making in general) should be restricted to this power of expressing thought in imagery. By the power of intuitive insight which distinguishes him from most other men, he *sees* deep truths of nature and

life; and by the power of imagination, which distinguishes him from other seers, he embodies ideas and feelings, in themselves abstract, in concrete ideas which impress themselves as pictures on the mind; and by his command of language, he expresses his ideas in words by which they are conveyed, without loss of clearness, to other minds.

This is what Shelley means by saying that "poetry may be defined in a general sense as the expression of the imagination." Wordsworth has given the word a definite meaning which it did not possess before And, thus understood, it may be said to be the most characteristic endowment of the poet.

Coleridge following the philosopher Schelling attaches very deep philosophical significance to this power of productive, or 'creative' and organising, imagination. It is a repetition in the finite mind of the original act of creation in the infinite "*I am*" as the absolute power gives out life, and makes life evolve the world of organic things which are its concrete embodiment and expression, so the finite life-power which works in the poet's mind lays hold of some truth of nature or life, and makes it unfold itself into an organism of ideas in which it is permanently embodied and expressed.

This spontaneous working of the creative life of nature in the poet's mind is *primary*

imagination. But Coleridge gives more importance to art than Wordsworth and Shelley. The poet, by effort of his own will, can *react* on the ideas which thus rise spontaneously in his mind as if they came by inspiration; and can make them assume such orders and forms as will suit the particular end which he has in view. This is *secondary* imagination, and evidently an element of art. Hence according to Coleridge, the poet himself will have more to do in the making of a poem than Shelley seems to think. He must have art as well as inspiration.

Thus Fancy supplies the "drapery" of a poem, *i e*, the decorative and external elements, which are pleasing but no part of the life of the poem (like the fringes on a lady's garment). Imagination supplies "the soul which is everywhere and in each part, and forms all into one uniform and graceful whole." The *meaning* - the generic idea and feeling which evolves all the parts—pervades all the parts and makes them to be one living whole

The difference is well seen in such poems as Shelley's *Cloud* and *Skylark*. The former gives pleasure by making a stream of brilliantly-coloured pictures pass before the mind's eye; but they embody no deep meaning, and are only mental play. The latter gives pleasure also, but it is by expressing, in a series of vivid pictures, the deep meaning and feeling of the

poet, in such a way that others cannot but think and feel in the same way as the poet does. Wordsworth's *Poems of Fancy* and *Poems of Imagination* differ in the same way.

PART II.

Shelley's Theory of Poetry

Occasion of Shelley's Treatise.

In 1820 Thomas Love Peacock wrote a treatise called *The Four Ages of Poetry* in which he attempted, or pretended, to show that poetry had meaning and value only in primitive, barbarous and superstitious times, that as civilisation advanced poetry had by successive stages declined, and is in modern times ceasing to have any meaning or utility, and must give way to more useful pursuits, and soon die out.

Thus it originated and flourished in barbarous times when the chief interest of life lay in the struggles of rival tribes, exploits of chiefs, and daring adventures of heroes, and when supernatural beings such as gods and goddesses, with both supernatural and human attributes, were supposed to join in the struggles of men and make them still more wonderful and interesting In such times Poetry originated,—probably in the form of ballads, describing and glorifying the achievements, of tribes and chiefs. Such ballads sometimes grew together into continuous narratives, and gave rise to the such works as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and other Greek epics of the different cycles, and

to the Teutonic epics of the *Nibelungs*, *Gudrun*, etc., and the less fully elaborated epics of the Celtic races.

But these ages of racial struggles, with their heroes and adventures, gradually gave way to organised institutions, civilisation and peace. Then science, undetermined belief in magical and supernatural wonders Industry and commerce now take the place of tribal struggles and conquests. Thus as civilisation advanced there ceased to be any materials, or much demand for poetry. It sank more and more into feeble repetition and imitation of older works, without sincerity, and received with only artificial and affected interest. This decay was now reaching a climax Poetry was ceasing to be of real use, or to command any genuine interest.

The busy industrial life of modern times leaves no leisure for such unproductive pursuits.

Shelley took this treatise more in earnest than its author perhaps intended, and wrote his *Defence*, exhibiting what he believes to be the real nature and use of poetry, and showing that such arguments are founded on a misunderstanding of the meaning of poetry. Yet much the same thing was said soon afterwards by other writers. Hazlitt said : "Science clips the wings of imagination." Macaulay wrote : "We think that as civilisation advances, poetry almost necessarily declines. In proportion as men

know more and think more, they make better theories but worse poems." But Wordsworth had foreseen and answered such objections long before, in his *Preface*. Such opinion, however, served to confirm Wordsworth's theory that a new kind of poetry was needed.

The Faculty of Poetry.

We must begin the exposition by contrasting Imagination as the faculty of Poetry with Reason (meaning understanding) as the faculty of Science. Reason is the power by which we take concrete things to pieces, find the forces working in them and the uniformities according to which they work, and express them in general propositions, thereby reducing the concrete world to a system of abstract laws. Thus science proceeds from the concrete to the abstract. Imagination proceeds in the opposite direction, *viz.*, from the abstract and general to the concrete —beginning with ideas and feelings more or less vague and abstract, and making them substantial and permanent by embodying them in concrete imagery. Thus the truths at which science arrives can be comprehended only by effort of abstraction, as in mathematical formulæ. Imagination reduces the truths which it reveals to images in which they are *seen* by the mind's eye, as in pictures.

The working of imaginative power is seen best in poetry. It lays hold of some truth, in itself

general and abstract, and enters into it like a life-force and expands it into a system of related ideas, and makes them all co-operate as organs toward the fuller expression of the fundamental idea, and makes the system of ideas thus evolved to be, as it were, one concrete living whole—a poem.

Thus while the methods of science correspond to the disintegrating forces of nature (it "murders to dissect"), imagination corresponds to the integrating, evolving, life-giving force. It is the constructive power of nature reproducing itself in the finite mind.

This, then, is the reason why Shelley says, "Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be 'the expression of the imagination,'" and this effort to give concrete embodiment to ideas and feelings may fairly be said to be "connate with the origin of man."

The Motive Force: the Ideal

And this impulse towards expression and construction must have a motive. There is possible always "a certain order and rhythm" which "will give an intenser and purer pleasure than any other." The natural impulse of rational mind is to raise itself above its present circumstances. There is present always a feeling that something better is possible, and therefore a continual striving to improve upon the present,

and to picture in the mind beforehand some combination which would be more satisfactory than what is actually presented by experience. And this feeling of the possibility of something better and higher—this 'ideal' however vaguely conceived it may be supplies the impulse underlying all the working of imagination

Thus from the beginning human beings have been receiving sense impressions from the external world, retaining and reviving them in the form of ideas, and rising from the form given by nature to some more ideal form

Hence, when agreeable, they have had an instinctive tendency not only to reproduce them, but to improve upon them. The child hears the bird singing and at once tries to sing like the bird, and sees the lamb dancing, and at once begins to imitate the lamb; but tries to sing and dance better than bird or lamb. Animals imitate one another but never go beyond imitation. Rational beings however, cannot stop with merely imitating. They have an instinctive feeling that they can improve upon nature. They combine the ideas of what they have experienced into new combinations, and thereby form conceptions of what will be better than nature. And they strive to impose their conceptions on nature by giving them permanent objective existence. They may embody their conceptions in matter and produce tools, houses, clothing,

lects, roads and works of art. They may substantialise them in uniformities of procedure and produce customs, laws, governments, religions. Or they may give them permanence as systems of ideas expressed in words, and produce literature.

Thus all human constructions have their beginning in thought, and are at first constructions of imagination or ideas. Then they give expression and concrete embodiment to ideas, and thereby introduce something new and better into the world of nature. Therefore inventors, legislators, builders and artists, religious reformers and makers of new institutions, are all poets in the wider sense of the word. They think and feel, and transform their thoughts into concrete realities.

The wind blows on the Æolian harp, and makes its strings vibrate and produces musical sounds, but the harp does not hear, nor remember, nor do anything to improve upon its own vibration. The same vibrations communicated to the human ear produce corresponding vibrations there, but there is this difference; the human subject feels them as sensations, and preserves them as ideas, and sees the possibility of improving upon them by modifying the causes from which they spring, and sets imagination to work to construct ideas of musical instruments which will produce better music than the wind and the harp. Thus the sights and sounds of nature excite the mind to imitation, imitation excites

of its improvement, and improvement leads to art.

Thus the materials for the constructions of imagination are supplied by the forces of nature acting from without, but the impulse is the striving to improve on nature and impose on nature the ideas of the mind itself. Mind seeks to transform the world by imposing upon it feelings and ideas evolved from within itself. But the first step in its work is imitation—man must imitate before he can surpass, and all the creative works of men begin in imitation, as music and dancing begin in imitation of the sounds and movements of nature.

Imitation in Poetry.

Hence many have assumed (following what has been supposed to have been the opinion of Aristotle) that all art, poetry included, is essentially imitation, a copying merely of what is seen in nature and life. So that the excellence of the picture and statue, the poem, play and novel, consists in its being an accurate transcript of what is actually experienced in life. This principle is carried out, no doubt, in extreme forms of *realistic* art (in poetry, painting, novel-writing, etc.), for there have always been periods of re-action against "romantic" extravagance, back to literal reality.

But imitation is only the beginning and the lowest form of art. In "the youth of the world

men dance and sing, and imitate natural objects," but they do more than this. The impulse which comes from nature is not to imitate nature merely, but to improve upon nature. Nature itself is always striving towards something higher than itself, and finds its outlet and channel in the rational mind—which nature makes to be the medium through which nature produces something higher than itself. Therefore, when primitive men danced and sang in imitation of the motions and sounds of nature, there was in their minds at the same time the feeling that there was "a certain rhythm and order" of movements and sounds which would produce an intenser and purer pleasure than those of nature; and in course of time the feeling deepened into the conviction that there are standards of good which are not to be found in nature or life, but which have "an eternal right" to be, and are seen by the legislator, the inventor, the founder of religions and the poet. (Therefore, beginning perhaps with primitive dancing and singing, art has risen beyond mere imitation of nature and has striven, not indeed to add any new law or force to nature, but to draw out what is in nature, and make nature surpass itself, and to be the agent of nature, not its rival.)

Thus legislators, inventors and authors of new industrial systems are not satisfied with imitating nature, but try to make nature produce something

higher. So it must be with the artist and poet. The imitation theory with the literal realism to which it leads, does not give a satisfactory account of poetry and art.

Poetry in the Narrower Sense

To evolve such ideals in thought and guide men to their realisation, is the work of imagination. (Hence inventors, artists, legislators, founders of states and religions, work through imagination, and are therefore poets (makers) in the widest sense of that word.) But we must "circumscribe the word poetry within the limits of that 'art' which is the most familiar and perfect application of the faculty." This is the 'art' which consists in the substantialising of thought and feeling (not in material things as machinery, buildings and the like, but) in ideas and language, realising the beauty which is to be attained in constructions wholly mental, which is poetry.

Thus every art and industry is distinguished by the materials in which the constructive imagination peculiar to it operates—in colours and forms, in wood and stone and metals. The materials of poetical imagination (in the narrowest sense) are ideas with the feelings rising out of them, and language which becomes so closely associated with and so essential to thought that idea and word become almost identical (M. Muller).

"The poet therefore will be one who can see truths and objects in nature and life which others cannot see, and reduce them to ideas and then to language, and present them to the mind in such a way as to produce the feeling of the beautiful and the (formal) condition of their being beautiful is that they be fused into unity by one pervading idea and feeling, and presented to the mind not in the form of abstractions (as in prose) but in that of concrete pictures (as in painting, etc.) so that the truth expressed can be seen intuitively by the mind's eye without effort of reasoning."

There is a difference of opinion, however, as to the kind of ideas and feelings required as the material of the beautiful. Some think that the life of nature tends upwards towards something higher than nature itself, and that therefore no thoughts or feelings can enter into the truly beautiful which are not elevating and ennobling, in line with nature itself (Wordsworth). Others however think that the beautiful consists wholly in the excellence of the expression itself, and has nothing to do with the morality, wisdom, or any other quality, of the thoughts and feelings expressed (Croce, the theory of art for art's own sake).

Thus from the youth of the world onwards men have been seeing truths in nature and life, and feeling the feelings that rise out of them. But truths and feelings are vague and abstract, and

difficult to preserve and communicate. Therefore the effort to see truths has always been accompanied by the correlative effort to embody and preserve them by giving them concrete forms (this effort is seen in the paintings and carvings left by the most primitive peoples on rocks and the walls of caves) But music, painting and sculpture were limited in their range of expression Therefore from the beginning of intelligence, the attempt to 'substantialise' and preserve thought and feeling took mainly the form of embodying them in pictorial *ideas* and expressing these in language. And thought and feeling thus expressed is poetry Thus poetry became the most universal way of expressing the beautiful

Therefore it may fairly be said that poetry is connate with intelligence as soon as men began to think, their imaginative power began to seek means of preserving and communicating thought, and that, in forms of correct imagery in which it could be *seen* and comprehended by all; and such constructions of imagination were poetry.

It follows that poetry is something very different from what was assumed by Peacock and other critics (even Hazlitt had said "science clips the wings of poetry"). Its purpose was not to satisfy the combative instincts of men by commemorating the achievements of warriors and conquerors, nor to amuse them by playing with the ideas of gods, fairies and wizards as they

had supposed (which is only poetry of fancy). It was a way of seeing, feeling and expressing the deepest truths of nature and life, satisfying thereby the deepest needs of human nature, and deeply affecting human life. It was, as Wordsworth had said, "the first and last of all knowledge, and as immortal as the heart of man" "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth." It presents life in concrete imagery, and presents not "what is partial and accidental and possible only at a particular time and in a particular combination of events," but what is true of human nature universally, or rises out of it as natural consequence.

A poem is therefore different from a 'story or history.' A story is a catalogue of detached facts which have no other connection than time, place and accidental circumstances. A poem is founded on some germinal truth present in idea, such that this one idea gives rise to another idea and all these ideas co-operate with one another to form one organic whole, in accordance with the laws of development and life inherent eternally in the mind of God, and in this complex result the fundamental idea with its feeling find their full expression. It is in the working of this life-force which works in all things, that, interest and beauty lie. (History, giving the series of facts but missing the inner life which gives connection to them, "observes and distorts what

should be beautiful": poetry restores the beauty of what has been distorted, by bringing to light again the inner life which has been obscured.)

Poetry in Language.

The universality of poetic imagination is seen in the origin of language itself. The number of original roots in a language (words not derived from other words) is comparatively small. They are commonly supposed to have been words standing for concrete things—the stone, tree, river, hill. But thought soon extended to relations between things, and thereby to general and abstract ideas. As this development of thought proceeded, there was difficulty in finding new words to express these almost new ideas. This was accomplished not by inventing new words, but by making the old words, or combinations of them, serve the purpose. Thus we find that all our compound words standing for general and abstract ideas, involve metaphor (the 'carrying over' of a word from its original thing to include another thing having something in common with it). Thus when a general or abstract idea was found to contain within it some quality found also in a particular concrete thing, the word for that thing might be extended in meaning to include also the general idea. Thus practically all our abstract terms have concrete things behind them,

and to understand the abstract fully we have to revive the concrete in which we can see it pictured. Coleridge says, "in order to get the full sense of a word we should first present to ourselves the visual image that forms its primary meaning" (that is, if we still know what it was; as many words are only "faded metaphors," the original concrete thing being often forgotten).

Thus the word *abstraction* here used, meant originally the physical process of pulling things asunder—drawing one part away from another. But it has been 'carried over' to include the mental process of drawing out from one idea another idea which, though different, has still something in common with the original, and may therefore be expressed by the same word. *Derive* meant to draw aside some of the water of a stream (*rivus*) and make it flow in another direction. *Consider* is believed to have meant originally to notice the relative positions (*con*) of the stars (*sidera*) and foretell the consequence. *Origin* means a rising up, as the sun rises *Conclude*, to close together in one place as sheep in a fold. *Express* means to squeeze out the juice of fruit *Complicate* was suggested by many strands of thread entangled together. Such words therefore are metaphors.

Thus most words were originally metaphors In most cases, perhaps, we have forgotten the

original meaning so that they have ceased to be metaphors to us. "words are *faded* metaphors" But the men who originally made the words, understood the metaphors contained in them When they used the word, they saw the original thing for which the word stood, and, reflected or embodied in the thing, they saw the secondary meaning. When they heard the words *derive*, *consider*, *origin*, *express*, they saw in their mind's eye the divided stream, the group of stars, the rising sun, etc., and these made the abstract thoughts at once to rise in their minds.

Thus "the language of primitive men was vitally metaphorical." But this expression of thought in concrete imagery is the work of imagination, and therefore poetry "In the infancy of society language is itself poetry" Every word is a little image expressing a thought. "Every language near to its source is the chaos of a cyclic poem," every word being a little poem by itself; and many such words might be connected together in such a way as to build up a larger poem; as the many scattered ballads of ancient Greece were connected together by the rhapsodes (Homer, etc) and made into the epic poems of the Trojan, Theban Argive and other cycles of Greek legend (referring to theory of Christian Wolff regarding the origin of the Homeric and other epics, which was the view most in keeping with the tendencies

of the new romantic school of poetry in Germany and England, viz. to spontaneous and natural expression of the thought and feelings of a people).

Hence the error of those who argue that poetry belongs to a particular phase of human history, and no other It is founded in human nature, and is manifested even in the development of language.

Poetry and Music, Metre

Thus all human constructions—industrial, political, religious and artistic as well as literary - are embodiments of ideas, developed within the mind by power of imagination; and are therefore poetry in the widest sense of the word; and the architect, the inventor, and the legislator are all poets. But we commonly restrict the word poetry to constructions built of ideas, which are valued not for practical purposes but for the sake of the thought and feeling which they substantialise and perpetuate in language, and which have permanent influence on human life.

With regard to the language of poetry no general principle need be laid down beyond this; that it should be such as will express most clearly and fully the thought and feeling which is the soul of the poem But words do not give adequate expression to feeling without music.

Therefore the genuine poet, in drawing out his thought and feeling in words, will draw out the music which is in words, *viz*, by rhythm and metre, and the rhythm of the language will be in harmony with the thought and feeling of the poem, so that the thought and sound will be one harmonious whole. Hence the importance of metre in poetry.

But in the development of this harmonious whole there is nothing really artificial. The thought and feeling of the poet finds for itself the language required to express it, and gives to the language the rhythm and motion which is in keeping with itself. Indeed, the thought, the words and the symphony are not things at first separate and then put together. They are all three correlative to one another and grow together as factors of one life in the poet's mind. The poets thoughts "voluntary move harmonious numbers."

Poetry cannot be made.

It follows that a poem cannot be made; it must grow. A true poem has its germ in some truth of life, and branches out by a natural development in the poet's mind (as the plant grows from its germ in the soil, one part out of another—trunk, branches leaves and flower) and when complete is like a living organism, in which every part has life (meaning) in itself

and at the same time contributes to the common life of the whole

"Poetry is not like reasoning, a thing which can be asserted according to determination of the will A man cannot say, 'I will compose a poem' The power rises from within like the colour of a flower." It is an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry have been produced by labour and study Milton felt as if the heavenly muse "dictated" to him his "unpremeditated song." It comes as "the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own." It may be true however that no great poet has succeeded in fully substantialising in language the visions that came to him in thought, and that what we have in writing is far inferior to what was in the poet's mind.

It comes over his mind "as the wind over the sea," and the traces which it leaves in the mind are imperfect as those which the waves leave on the sandy beach.

The Great Epic Poems.

The greatest of all poetic forms, doubtless is the epic which contains within it all the other forms The great epic poet is one whose "creation" gives expression to the "knowledge, sentiments and religion," the manners, thoughts, beliefs and aspirations of his own nation and time. If the nation and time are not his own,

the expression will not be at firsthand, and therefore genuine, spontaneous and sincere—it will be more or less artificial. Judged by this standard there will be but three epic poets of the first class—Homer who expressed spontaneously and sincerely the mind and life of Greece, B.C. 1000—Dante who expressed with intensity and conviction, the mind of catholic Italy in the middle age—and Milton who did the same for protestant England in the reformation period. Virgil and Tasso cannot be included because they dealt with other times than their own, so that their creations did not rise in their minds spontaneously, but were built up artificially out of materials acquired by learning, and in which they did not really believe. Their work is fancy more than imagination. This is the judgment of the Romantic school (Schlegel, etc.).

Poetry and Utility.

W. L. Peacock had asked triumphantly what is the use of poetry? as if no answer could be given to the question. How could the unreal constructions of poetical imagination stand beside the practical discoveries of science and the creations of industry? Producers must be valued according to the utility of their productions. Therefore "poets had been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists"—poetry being so much inferior in utility.

But what is this utility? What is really useful? Everything is useful which supplies some need of human nature. These needs are of two kinds; (*a*) needs of the physical life manifested in the states of the bodily organism. These needs are real and those who contribute to their supply are benefactors of humanity, and this is what is aimed at in scientific inquiry and industrial arts. The critics of poetry are thinking only of these.—To them, those things alone are really useful which contribute to the supply of food, clothing and shelter.

(*b*) But there is another class of needs to which physical needs are contributory. The body exists for the sake of the mind—the physical needs therefore are subordinate to mental needs, and whatever supplies the needs of the mind will be useful even in a higher sense than those which supply the subordinate bodily needs.

Does poetry, then, contribute in any way to the needs of the mind? If so, it will be useful in the highest degree. Now the life of the mind consists in thinking. Thinking extends over the needs of the physical life which supports the mental. But thought rises above the needs of the physical life, and seeks satisfaction in a world of its own, and strives after comprehension and understanding of the world in which it lives, and forms ideals of things higher and better than any in the actual world, and strives to

approximate more and more towards their realisation.

And the function of poetry is to help men to see and feel their position in this actual world, and to use this knowledge of what is to form clearer conceptions of what might and should be, and thereby stimulate to a life of action for the advancement of humanity. This enlightening and stimulating influence makes poetry to be 'useful' in the highest degree, and to be a powerful force in the development of life and mind.

Hence it is in the most active periods of the world's life that poetry pours itself forth most spontaneously and abundantly. It is not so much the poets themselves, but rather the spirit of their age that speaks through them, and that, even where they themselves do not fully understand its revelations. "They are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration" and in their minds as in mirrors are reflected the innermost workings of the life of nature.

PART III.

Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworth

The "Lyrical Ballads", origin of controversy on poetic diction.

Wordsworth and Coleridge lived for great part of the year 1797-98 in each other's company. Coleridge had already written two volumes of poems. These poems contained some fine lines and verses, but consisted largely of common thought expressed in the conventional and grandiose diction of the time. Wordsworth also had written a few poems, and even these were not altogether free from the same fault. But both had now come to see the weakness of this style and to see that, in consequence of it, English poetry had fallen into a state of decline, and that a new beginning was needed. They resolved to attempt such a beginning by writing together a small volume of poems on new subjects, and in a new style. Coleridge was to take supernatural incidents, and treat them in such a way as to make them appear to be natural. Such subjects had been introduced into literature some years before, in prose tales and in ballads, by what some have called the school of "terror,"

but the treatment had been merely sensational and no meaning had been given to their tales. Coleridge was to put meaning into his supernatural stories, and, by picturesque description and familiar language, was to produce the illusion of reality. Wordsworth was to take subjects from common life, and treat them as far as possible in the language of common life, and to show that even common things contain meanings and suggestions sufficient to raise a feeling of the presence of supernatural powers working in the natural. In short, Coleridge was to make the supernatural seem natural, and Wordsworth was to make the natural seem supernatural—thus showing the interpenetration of the two.

Thus Wordsworth was the first to make *explicit* in English thought the feeling of the transcendental *i.e.*, that behind (above, transcending) the outward appearances which things present to the senses, there are deeper powers at work which reveal themselves to us in these appearances—a supernatural which is *in* the natural—

> "A motion and a spirit which impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things;"

and this enables him to find deep meanings even in common things. This spiritualizing of nature

continued to be the "burden" of all his best poetry;

"Prophet he was to us all
Of the beauty and bloom of the world;"

but to him its "beauty and bloom" did not consist (as to Keats) in its giving pleasant sensations, but in revealing deep meanings—the presence of "something far more deeply interfused."

Wordsworth's contributions and their significance.

The book contained some twenty poems of which only one was of considerable length, *viz.*, the *Ancient Mariner*. Wordsworth's contribution amounted to seventeen or eighteen pieces, but mostly short, the most considerable being *Tintern Abbey*. A number of these deal with subjects taken from "humble and rustic" life. A few are dramatic in form, making humble people speak for themselves. A few may be called semi-dramatic, the poet himself speaking, but speaking as one of the people with whom he is dealing. These poems on humble life are written in language as near as possible to that of the people themselves. Some have nothing to do with humble life, and in these the poet speaks in his own person and uses the language natural to himself (*e.g.*, *Tintern Abbey*,—*Lines Written in Early Spring*), and it is in these that the power

of his contribution mainly lies, introducing, as they do, a new vein of thought and feeling into English poetry.

Thus in dealing dramatically with rural life, he makes his rustic people speak like themselves —following as far as possible the words and the ways of thinking characteristic of the people. Being a poet he has to put into their mouths, sometimes, poetical ideas which would hardly have occurred to the persons themselves; but he takes care to use such language as they themselves might have used, avoiding altogether the artificial "poetic diction" —the peculiar words, and phrases, allusions, personification and grandiose generalities then thought essential to poetry.

But the critics of the day, who had come to think that the diction which had become predominant during the century was identical with poetry itself, criticised his work very severely. They said that both his subjects and his language were beneath the dignity of poetry Some of his poems were childish, and the rest were unintelligible.

Wordsworth's theory of poetic language.

He replied to them in the *Preface* of 1800. In this preface he (*a*) explains his choice of subjects and language in the *Lyrical Ballads*; and (*b*) sketches his theory of the nature of poetry and its

relation to science, and deduces, from the nature of poetry, the kind of language which should be used in poetry generally. We have therefore to distinguish between what he says regarding the subjects, language and style of the few poems on rustic life contained in the *Ballads*, and what he says regarding those of poetry in general. Coleridge and many others have overlooked this distinction, and have presented him as teaching that subjects taken from "humble and rustic" life (as by himself in a few of the *Ballads*) and the rustic language put dramatically into the mouths of these rustic people in these particular poems, should be the subjects and language of all poetry. And when in other poems, he takes up different subjects and speaks not dramatically, but in his own person, expressing his own thought in the language natural to himself (*e.g.*, *Tintern Abbey*), they accuse him of contradicting thereby his own teaching. In other words, because Wordsworth, in speaking dramatically through the mouths of country people, uses approximately the style of country people, he thereby pleaded himself, they say, to use that style universally even when speaking his own thought in his own person, and taught that all other poets should do the same.

But what he really did teach was (*a*) *negatively*, that poetry should avoid the "gaudy and inane phraseology" and artificial diction by

which so many poets had sought to conceal poverty of thought and to make commonplace ideas to be thought poetry; and (*b*) *positively*: that poetry consists not in the use of high-sounding words and phrases, but in the expression of thought and feeling and that the best expression of poetical thought and feeling is such language" as is really *used* by men," and that "there neither is nor can (should) be any essential difference between the language of poetry and that of prose when well written" He argues that a poet is but a man like other men, and that his thoughts and feelings are just like those of other men, and can therefore be adequately expressed in the same language which is used by men, and needs no artificial language to express them; and that a true poet requires no artifices of diction to give his work a false appearance of being poetry

Further, as Wordsworth holds that there should be no essential difference between the language used in poetry and that used in prose, they virtually accuse him of holding that there should be no difference between poetry itself and prose itself overlooking Wordsworth's fundamental principle, that poetry consists not in the words and phrases used, but in the thought expressed; and it is in respect of these that poetry differs from prose.

In this teaching Wordsworth was moved by what he saw to be the unreality of much that passed for poetry. He believed that the real poet is one who sees what other men cannot see, and that his thought about what he sees is deeper and wider than that of others. But in much of what then passed for poetry, the thought was superficial and ordinary, or gathered laboriously from the older writers; and the feeling was superficial or pretended; and yet such ordinary and second-hand material was made to seem new and different from ordinary by being expressed in a peculiar kind of language. Common objects were represented by uncommon words and phrases. Ordinary facts were made to seem different from ordinary by being expressed in high-sounding periphrases. Particular events unimportant in themselves, were made to seem important by being expressed in pompous generalisations.

In the way the commonness of the thought was concealed; and an appearance of depth, originality and dignity was attained by periphrastic and exaggerated language. Poverty of thought was compensated for by "splendour of diction."

Exemplified in the "Lyrical Ballads."

Against this Wordsworth in his *Lyrical Ballads* endeavoured to show that poetry could

be expressed in language differing but little from that of real life, and might excite interest, not by the use of uncommon language, but by the force of the thought and feeling expressed. (1) In some of these poems he sought to show that there is poetry in the lives even of humble rustic people, and that it could be expressed in the language *really used* by the people themselves, without having recourse to the turgid diction of the other poets of the time. (2) In others he sought to show that poetry of deep thought and feeling could be written in such language as was *really used* by himself and other people of the same class (*Tintern*, *Abbey*, etc.), and that such poetry could gain nothing by being expressed in artificial poetic diction or such language as was *really used* by nobody in the real life.

And the general theory taught in the *Preface* is that all poets should (like himself in this respect) trust to the originality and depth of what they had to say, and not to use of uncommon language. This he considered to be simply literary honesty, avoiding 'clap-trap.'

Yet there may be some inducement or temptation at times, even for good poets, to use language of this kind. In long poems (as Coleridge himself remarked) there must be many passages which afford no opportunity for poetic thought or feeling, *e.g.*, passages of transition

or explanation. How are these to be composed? Two ways are possible, (*i*) They may be expressed in language natural to the substance of the passages, that is, in simple, though perhaps rhythmical, prose: or (*ii*) the poet may conceal their prosaic character by expressing them in grandiose "poetic diction." Wordsworth adopts the former method (compare similar prosaic passages in Milton and Shakespeare). Hence so many passages in his poetry appear flat and prosaic. They really are such, and Wordsworth meant them to be such, and regarded such literary "honesty" as a prime duty of the poet.

Relations of Coleridge to Wordsworth

Now Coleridge had been Wordsworth's partner in the composition of the book which had raised so much controversy. His poems in that collection, written under the influence of Wordsworth, were free from the turgid diction of his earlier poetry (which has been described as containing "intolerable platitudes expressed in more intolerable bombast") Long before the composition of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) he had been the neighbour and frequent companion of Wordsworth in the Lake district. Therefore he had come to be closely associated in the minds of the public with Wordsworth (and also with his other neighbour Southey) as a member of the "Lake school,"

and thought to be at one in all essentials of opinion with Wordsworth. Nevertheless in his *Biographia* he protests against this opinion, and expresses surprise that such a mistake should ever have been made. For 17 years he had been the object of depreciation and adverse criticism amounting almost to personal abuse. He had long been unable to understand the reason of this; he was not aware of having done anything to deserve it. But at last he had come to see that it must be owing to his supposed connection with Wordsworth and Southey. He had stood so near to them that much of the cold water thrown on them had fallen on him also. And yet Southey could not be the cause of this persistent ill-will. Like himself Southey had done nothing to deserve it ; his works were all admirable, and above satirical criticism.

Therefore Wordsworth must be the cause of this undeserved depreciation which had fallen on both Southey and himself. It was undeserved, because as he now tells us, he had never agreed at all with Wordsworth's theory of poetic language which had drawn on him so much denunciation.

His opposition to Wordsworth's theory of poetic language.

This was surprising, and it seemed ungenerous to lay the blame of his own unpopularity

on one to whom he owed so much And he seems in various points inconsistent with himself. He had co operated with Wordsworth in the production of the *Literary Ballads*. He had expressed admiration for Wordsworth's poetry, and general agreement with his theory and methods; he had often expressed dissatisfaction with the literary style of the time, and had done it in language even stronger than Wordsworth's. His best poetry was during, or subsequent to his intercourse with Wordsworth in 1797, and clearly under his influence.

But on the other hand, his earlier poems (*Religious Musings* and *Sibylline Leaves*, had been written to no small extent in the turgid rhetorical diction of the time. He had come to appreciate (he admits) and to emulate the plainer style of Wordsworth, but it seems that (like Campbell and others) he still retained some liking for the style in which he had begun, and still believed that poetry may be improved (at least) by being expressed in flowery language different from that of prose.

Therefore, in his *Biographia* (1817), while agreeing with, and in parts re-stating and even deepening, Wordsworth's theory of poetry in general, he comes forward as an adverse critic of Wordsworth's theory of poetic language (Chapter XVII and XVIII) and appears to assume that poetry consisted as much in the

phraseology used as in the thought and feeling expressed, and that poetic diction is necessary to some extent (he does not show clearly to what extent) in poetry.

Misunderstanding of Wordsworth.

But his criticism is confused not a little by his own confusing of the two purposes of Wordsworth's treatise, Wordsworth had undertaken to show generally that poetry can be written in such language as is *really used* by men, and therefore in language not *essentially* different from that of prose. And to illustrate this, he had shown (*a*) also that the lives of common people are fit subjects for poetry, and that poetry can be adequately expressed in such simple language as is *really used* by such people—bringing out what is really true of their lives without the need of ornamental diction. And with this purpose in view he had written *The Thorn*, *Goody Blake*, *The Idiot Boy*, and some others. And also (*b*) that the highest poetry can be expressed in such language as was *really used* by such persons as himself, and others of the same class, without any artificial "splendour of diction," and therefore also in language, hardly different from what they would have used in serious prose; and with this in view he wrote *Tintern Abbey*, and other pieces (and no one could say that these would have been improved by being

written in the style of the *Botanic Garden* or the *Pleasures of Hope* or Coleridge's own *Religious Musings*) And he justified the introduction of rustic people and their speech into poetry (1) by showing that the natural life lived by these people is more interesting than the artificial life of society; and (2) that their language, being evolved to express the great phenomena of nature, is nearer to that original concrete pictorial language of the early world, from which the abstract vocabulary of the "higher life" is derived by metaphorical transference (as Shelley shows); and (3) showing that we must ourselves revive that primitive language in thought, to understand these abstract ideas clearly; and (4) teaches that all poetry (not dramatic) is best when written in the language which is most natural and comes most spontaneously to the writer; and therefore in language not essentially different from that of prose when well written.

His arguments against Wordsworth's theory of poetic language.

But, whatever was his reason, Coleridge turns against Wordsworth in his *Biographia*, in respect of poetic diction.

1. He turns Wordsworth's defence of some of his rustic *Ballads* into a law for all poets, making him teach that all poetry should be on rustic subjects, and in the language of rustics, and thinks that he is refuting Wordsworth

in showing that this is impossible. But what Wordsworth said was merely that such people are fit subjects for poetry, and their language when selected from and corrected is well suited for some kinds of poetry (his poems of rural life may be contrasted with those of Pope on the same subject, *e g*, his *Pastorals*).

2. In dealing with Wordsworth's higher poems he seems to assume that they are in contravention of his own theory of poetic language simply because they are poetry, and seem to assume some such dogmatic line of reasoning as this :

No real poem can be composed in conformity with Wordsworth's thory of poetic language, *i e*, in language really used by men.

But these pieces of Wordsworth's are real poems ;

Therefore they cannot be in conformity with his theory of language.

But this is not criticism ; the critic should show that they are not in language *really* used by men, nor in such as could not be used in good prose. To be sure, "really used by men," and 'usable in good prose" are rather wide criteria –prose itself varies from the plainness of Dryden, Addison or Southey to the flowery style of De Quincey, and it would be easy to show that Wordsworth very rarely violates his own principle rightly understood. Coleridge's attempts to do so will

be seen to be quite arbitrary—based on a careless reading of what Wordsworth really wrote.

His misconception is best exhibited, perhaps, in the otherwise fine passage in which he refers to certain poems in a "sustained and lofty style" which Wordsworth has introduced among his rustic *Ballads*. These lofty compositions are in direct contradiction, he thinks, of Wordsworth's theory of poetic language. But to make this out he would have to prove that the lofty character of these poems is due to the language in which they are expressed and its difference from that of common life and prose; which would be in defiance of Wordsworth's theory. But in what does the merit of the poems (*e.g.*, *Tintern Abbey*) really consist? Surely it does not rest in any conventional "splendour of diction." They are spoken in the poet's own person, and in the "common language" natural to himself and others of the same class. In some places the style is almost conversational; and nowhere does it depart from what would be permissible in serious prose. The effect of the poems springs wholly from the thought and feeling expressed and from its being expressed in simple language, not essentially different from language in common use, and commonly understood. And there is nothing in it opposed to any theory that Wordsworth ever laid down. It is just what he teaches to be the style of true poetry.

3. He argues further. Wordsworth's main criterion of good poetic language is an impracticable one "really *used* by men." There are many classes of men speaking different kinds of language, which of them does he really mean? He seems to mean only "low and rustic people", but they are not the only real men.

But this difficulty is quite imaginary. Wordsworth (in §21) makes it clear enough what he means. Different classes of men are all equally real. When the poet makes persons of a different class speak (dramatically), he will make every one speak like himself and those of his class. When the poet speaks in his own person, he will speak in the language which is natural to himself and his fellows. This is speaking the language of real men, and "adopting the real language of men."

4. When Wordsworth said that there should be "no *essential* difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition," what does he mean by *essential*? Such a statement can be nothing but a truism. There cannot be any *essential* linguistic difference between compositions written in the English language. To be *essentially* different, the one would have to be written in English and the other perhaps in Chinese.

But this again is an artificial criticism. It is clear enough what Wordsworth meant by

essential. If poetry were to be written largely in words and phrases which could not be used in normal prose, this would be an essential difference within the sphere of the English language, taken by itself. And he means to say that much of the poetry of his time was really of this character, and thinks that it is opposed to the nature of true poetry.—The true language of poetry is that in which the poet's ideas and feelings spontaneously clothe themselves; and this is the language natural to the poet, and therefore much the same as that which he would use in prose.

5. Wordsworth in some of the *Ballads* introduces rural people and makes them speak (dramatically) in their own simple style, and defends himself by saying that people living the natural life of the woods and hills are as interesting and instructive as people living the fashionable life of cities; and that their language, being drawn from their immediate intercourse with the great things of nature, is nearest to that original language of nature from which all the higher forms of language are derived.

But Coleridge denies that rural life produces high types of character. Perhaps it is his recently acquired fear of advancing democracy that makes him here depreciate the lower classes in both intellectual and moral respects; and to think that nothing good can come from them. Yet

Scott was showing in his own time and many have shown since, how much truth, humour and pathos can be drawn from the lives of the common people, and can be expressed in language much the same as their own. Wordsworth saw much more deeply than Coleridge did, and was free from his prejudices.

6. He points out that the language of uneducated people differs from that of the educated in this, that it is broken up into short incoherent statements, and that this is inconsistent with the nature of poetry, in which the thought flows on continuously. He quotes a stanza of Wordsworth in which the composition is of that broken and rustic style, and another in which it is continuous and poetical; and this shows, he assumes, that Wordsworth, to be poetic, must depart from the rustic style. But (1) the above is not true of all rustic expression and, further, Wordsworth never said that a poet should always write like a rustic; (2) the first-quoted stanza is really meant to be prose, being a passage of explanation or transition; and (3) the second stanza is poetry not because of its language, but because of its thought and feeling, and the pictures which it paints.

7. He argues against Wordsworth that the use of metre entails an important difference between the language of poetry and that of prose. "Metre paves the way for other distinctions."

The use of metre, he thinks, is to calm the feelings excited in poetry. "It is produced by a spontaneous effort to check the working of passion." But the spontaneous effort does not find by itself the very words and order needed for metre. For this an effort of will also is required. For the making of metre, there must be an "interpenetration of passion and will, of spontaneous impulse and voluntary purpose" (the primary and secondary forms of imagination spoken of elsewhere). But after telling us that metre is produced by effort to calm passion, he also tells us somewhat inconsistently that the additional passion produced by this "union of spontaneity and will can be manifested only in (*i.e.*, must produce) a frequency of forms and figures of speech (partly spontaneous and partly artificial) greater than could be desired or endured in the absence of such" (*i.e.*, apparently in sober prose).

This passage has the appearance of being mainly verbiage, and not free from contradiction. The substance of it is that, as poetry is the product of passion, the constant excitement produced by it must impel the poet to use forms of expression different from prose. Wordsworth would say that, if it is a function of metre to calm passion, so, in doing this, it must check the very extravagance of expression which Coleridge makes it produce and bring the language

of poetry nearer to that of prose. Coleridge thinks the effect of metre is to make poetry more flowery and rhetorical than prose. Wordsworth thinks that its effect is to moderate poetical style and check extravagance; and this will lead to the avoiding of rhetorical digression and reduction to the simplest forms of expression. Coleridge forgets that, if poetry is "passion," it is passion "recollected in tranquillity the calm reflection, not "the tumult of the soul" and to this calm of soul metre will contribute.

8. Finally he attempts to establish (against Wordsworth) by a series of examples, his view "that there may be, is, and ought to be, an essential difference between the language of prose and that of poetry." But he can do so only by the dogmatic assumption that whenever Wordsworth himself or any other poet produces poetry, his work *must* for that reason be contrary to Wordsworth's theory of poetic language, *i.e.*, must be composed in language essentially different from that of prose But the passages quoted differ from prose, not to any considerable extent in the language used, but in their bringing out the poetical aspect of things -the thought and feelings which they suggest—and the pictorial vividness of their presentation.

And Wordsworth's principle holds good that the best poetry is expressed in the simplest language, and that it would not be really good if not

so expressed, and that artifical poetic diction is of use only to disguise the want of real poetic power, and that those who depend on "poetic diction" to produce interest are not genuine poets. It may be possible indeed to find a kind of pleasure occasionally in variety, harmony, novelty and "splendour" of diction even when there is but little meaning underlying it, as in some poems of Swinburne (and Keats's "On a drear-nighted December"), but productions of this sort are not poetry of a high kind.

PART IV.

Aristotle's Theory of Poetry.

About 330 B.C. Aristotle wrote a treatise on Poetry which is commonly known as Aristotle's "Poetics." The portion of this treatise dealing with tragic and epic poetry has been preserved. It is the earliest, and has been regarded as the most authoritative expression of what is commonly called the classical type of poetry, and has often been edited, translated and commented on as such, and some points raised by it have given rise to much discussion.

His purpose, he says, is to treat of poetry in itself, and of the various kinds of poetry with their distinguishing characteristics, and to consider the number and nature of the parts into which a good poem should be divided, and how the parts are to be combined together to constitute a complete poem.

The principal kinds of poetry are epic poetry, tragedy and comedy, and lyric, while the music of the flute and lyre are so often combined with these as to be itself almost a kind of poetry. Of these, in the extant portion of the treatise, tragedy is treated at length, epic more briefly, comedy very slightly, and lyric is only referred to. Tragedy gets fullest

consideration because he considers it the highest kind, so that in dealing with it, he is dealing with the essential nature of poetry itself. Epic is lengthy, superficial and wanting in unity. Tragedy is poetry condensed, penetrates deeper into human nature, and is more capable of that unity and symmetry of many parts in one organic whole, which is the principal aim of classic poetry.

Nature of Poetry.

§2. All forms of poetry consist fundamentally of *imitation* (the word used, *viz.*, *mimesis*, is always translated *imitation*, though it seems to contain a shade of meaning not contained in the English word as commonly used).

This is true of the other arts as well;—all are imitations of nature and real life, and differ mainly in the objects imitated, the materials in which they imitate them, and their methods of imitation. Thus music imitates the different sounds of nature, and also (though less directly) human thought, feeling and character. Dancing by movement and attitude imitates to some extent feeling and character. Poetry imitates the actions of men and thereby their thoughts, feelings and characters, and does so through the medium of language, with its meanings, its rhythm and harmony. And the different forms of poetry are distinguished by the different

ays in which it imitates human action tragedy oing it in one way, epic and lyric in other ays. Each of these, again, will differ within itself according as it represents men as they really are, or as better or worse than they really are. Thus tragedy represents them as greater and nobler than in actual life; comedy, as lower, meaner, worse.

Source of Pleasure in Poetry.

§3 But why do people care for poetry? Poetry has its source in *two* fundamental tendencies seated deep in human nature.

(*a*) The instinctive tendency to imitate and take pleasure in imitation, which manifests itself in man from childhood onwards. Indeed, man differs from other living creatures, chiefly in this, that he is of all animals the most given to imitation; and it is by imitation that he learns his first lessons in the arts of life, and acquires his powers of doing things For this reason, then, that his life depends so much on imitation, nature has so constituted him as to take delight in imitation; and all his life he practises imitation, even when it is merely for the pleasure which it gives him, without practical use. Thus imitation has two reasons: (*i*) it is by imitating that man learns the necessary arts of life, and (*ii*) imitation is in itself a source of pleasure. Now this pleasure which imitation gives in the

motive force underlying poetry, sculpture, and painting, or what we call the fine arts, the pleasure which they all give being essentially that of imitation.

(*b*) The other source of poetry is this : we are so constituted by nature as to find delight in *rhythm* and *harmony*, and these sources of pleasure also are found in poetry (not to speak of the other fine arts).

Rhythm comes from a word meaning to *flow*, and signifies the way in which one process flows on continuously into another, without break or interruption —one sound and articulation into another, one thought and feeling into another, one movement, form or colour into another, and so on -without any such interruption as would necessitate a new beginning with the effort which it requires. In language, this *flow* is exhibited in the succession of articulate sounds in both prose and verse, so that we distinguish between prose rhythm and poetry rhythm - that of prose being usually unintentional and occasional, that of poetry more intentional and elaborate. This verbal *rhythm* or flow is attained by avoiding combinations of vowels without consonants (*hiatus*) and of consonants without vowels (*harshness*) because such combinations obstruct the flow of the voice in pronunciation, especially consonantal harshness. That difficulty is felt especially when the consonants stand in *unstressed*

syllables. The difficulty is relieved by throwing 'stress' upon the syllable, which is equivalent to separating the consonants and giving more time to each, thereby lessening the difficulty of pronunciation. Another way of avoiding harshness is by the insertion of 'helping' vowels (as when we say Hare-i-Street for the harsh combination Harestreet) It is difficult to pronounce 3 or even 2 consonants together. The metre of the Latin and Greek languages is founded on the principle of avoiding hiatuses of vowels, and overcoming harshness of consonants by making sure that combinations of two or three shall occur only in stressed syllables. (The difficulty of avoiding such combinations in unstressed syllables makes the difficulty which English poets have found in reviving the metres of ancient poets, as Longfellow in *Evangeline*, Kingsley in *Andromeda*, etc.)

Metres (measures), again, are the smallest 'portions,' or successive forms of movement, into which the flowing stream of articulate sound can be cut up. Thus sequences of long and short vowels with stressed and unstressed consonants, give iambus, trochee, spondee, dactyle, etc.—commonly called *feet*. —Regularly recurring series of feet in fixed numbers constitute lines (or verses) as 4, 5 or 6 iambuses producing iambic tetrameters, pentameters, hexameters, etc.—such studied regularity of recurring feet making

the difference which distinguishes poetry rhythm from that of prose. And it is by securing a succession of agreeable feet that rhythm is obtained and utterance is made easy and agreeable.

Different forms of rhythm (or series of feet) are suited to imitate and express different kinds of thought and feeling Thus iambic metres are most suitable for dialogue as in tragedy ; dactylic hexameters for rapid narration as in epic ; trochaic measures for light and nimble movement, as in daneing, etc.

Harmony comes from a word meaning to fit the parts of a thing together ; and is realised when things are so connected with each other that mind can pass easily from one to another, and can easily think and feel them all together as one whole -as the sounds of different instruments and voices in music, and the ideas and sounds which together make up a poem. Its opposite, discord, is when the things are such that mind cannot pass from one to another without feeling a disagreeable shock, nor comprise than all together in one complex conception as parts of one whole without painful effort.

Therefore *rhythm* refers to things in succession and is what enables mind to pass on easily from one thing to another in a series. Harmony refers more especially to things simultaneous ; and is what enables mind to grasp easily many

constituents in one whole of thought and feeling. Therefore they are but different forms of the same quality, and taken together, they constitute what is most fundamental in the classical conception of poetry and art. In different arts they appeal to the mind in different ways—in music, they appeal to the ear; in painting, sculpture, architecture to the eye. The rhythm and harmony of poetry however are more complex, being partly of articulations and sounds, but largely of ideas and feelings: making poetry to be more intellectual than the other arts. Thus a poem is a complex harmony of physical movements and efforts of the muscles of speech, sounds affecting the ear, and ideas and feelings passing through the mind.

Aristotle and Shelley.

§4. Thus poetry has its origin in two instinctive impulses inherent in mind—the craving for imitation and the craving for rhythm and harmony, with the pleasure which follows from the satisfaction of both. Aristotle may be here compared with Shelley. With regard to the second source of poetry, *viz.*, harmony, they are at one. With regard to the first, *viz.*, imitation, there appears to be a somewhat essential difference. According to Shelley, all art begins *from* imitation. "In the youth of the world men dance and sing and imitate natural objects."

But it is not art, strictly speaking, until it rises above imitation in the common sense of the word, *i.e.*, until it ceases to consist in a mere copying of things, and begins to improve upon things, and produce something better than is in nature. It must cease to be merely imitative, and become original and creative. "There is really no creator except God and the poet." The poet lays hold of the forces of nature, and makes them work together and co-operate in such a way as to realise the idea of something above nature.

But what did Aristotle really mean by *mimesis* (always translated, imitation). Does he mean literally imitation in the sense of copying and reproducing things, as commonly understood? In one place he tells us that it is not the function of the poet merely "to relate or describe what has happened"; that is the function of the historian. The poet is to represent "things which might be" or "probably will be" or "must be"—applying to his work the principles of probability and necessity. This clearly implies that it is the function of the poet to see into the laws of life, and to show how those laws will operate under circumstances different from those of actual experience, and thereby produce events, characters and results different from those seen in real life. "Therefore poetry is higher and more philosophical than history."

For history is superficial in this sense, that it shows only the things which present themselves in experience—"the things which are" here and now. The poet sees into the laws which produce things, and thereby sees what must be true in all times and places universally. He sees into the springs of things, which are above place and time in the infinite itself (Shelley and Wordsworth).

Dramatic Poetry.

§5. Poetical composition soon divided itself into two branches corresponding to different dispositions on the part of its writers and readers.

Some minds dwell naturally on great events and noble characters and things affecting deeply the destinies of men, and prefer to think of events exciting the deeper passions of human nature. Other minds turn naturally to small things trifling events, and mean persons, and take delight in exhibiting what is low and contemptible, and thereby raising laughter.

Minds of the former kind turn either to narrative poetry, imitating the lives of great men, and great events, and produce heroic or epic poetry, like Homer; or Tragedy, imitating in condensed style the deepest passions of the mind, and the darkest vicissitudes of life, raising feelings of pity and terror, like Æschylus and Sophocles. Those of the second class will

produce satires, burlesques ("satyrical" farces) and comedies, exposing what is mean and perverse in life, as Aristophanes does.

The *drama* or poetical imitation of action (from a verb to *do* or *act*) originated, it is believed, in religious worship, especially of Dionysus, god of nature, and began in the dithyrambs or choral hymns, sung by choirs of singers moving round the altar of the god. The hymns, recounted the life and achievements of the god, and his services to humanity. But the hymns proving monotonous, came to be varied by the introduction, at intervals, of a reciter who recited with appropriate gestures the doings of the god. Then another reciter was introduced, and reciting took the form of acting—imitating incidents in the life of the god. Gradually the element of acting assumed more importance, and the choruses were reduced to short hymns in intervals between the incidents of the action commenting on and pointing out the moral lessons of the action. Then secular subjects were introduced, though always, in tragedy, with some religious or moral significance.

Thus tragedies of the Greek type were shorter than those of modern times, simpler in structure, and were varied with choral song and music, which Aristotle seems to consider inseparable from dramatic poetry: and continued to have a more or less religious and ethical

significance. Comedy became freer in subjects and construction, and lost altogether the original religious character of drama.

Tragic Drama.

§5. The highest kind of poetry, Aristotle thinks, is tragedy, and to it, he devotes the greater part of his treatise. "Tragedy is the imitation of a great and impressive event, having a certain duration and complexity, and forming a complete whole in itself (*i.e.*, having a definite beginning, middle and end); it is expressed in language made agreeable by rhythm, harmony and music, varying in keeping with the different parts of the work; it is not merely recited but acted before an audience, and, by exciting pity and fear, it effects a purgation (*katharsis*) of such like passions."

The only part of this definition or description that presents any difficulty is the last clause, what does Aristotle mean by this *katharsis* (purgation or purification) of pity and fear, and how does the tragedy accomplish such a purgation. This question has excited a vast amount of discussion, but no satisfactory result has been arrived at. It is possible indeed that the word translated 'fear' conveyed also the sense of horror and aversion: in which case, the meaning would be that tragedy trains the mind to distinguish clearly between such things

as are worthy of sympathy and pity and such as are fit objects of abhorrence only

It is an imitation of an event (action) of "some magnitude," and such an event contains under it many subordinate incidents; and these taken together constitute the story or plot, which is the substance of the play -the imitation of some situation in real life.

These again require persons who act, *the dramatis personæ*—and the actions of the persons rise out of their *thought*, and their thought rises out of their intellectual and moral *character*. Hence in considering a play, we have to consider the persons and their thought and characters.

But their thought and therefore their characters are expressed in their language or *diction*, and to attain the indispensable rhythm their diction takes a *metrical* form, The rhythm of the metre is deepened in parts by *song* and *music* (*viz.*, in the choral parts). And the whole takes place on a particular spot with a particular set of surroundings which is the *scenery* of the play.

Hence the elements of a tragedy are plot, thought and character, language and rhythm, song and scenery.

Which of these elements, then, is the most fundamental (*i.e.*, the one out of which, all the others arise)? Many assume, Aristotle says, that it is *character*. And many at the present day think

so too; and some novelists and poets introduce lengthy descriptions of character (*e g*, G Elliot, Browning, etc.) and some dramatists have introduced long speeches, merely to bring out the characters of persons but which have little or nothing to do with the action. But Aristotle thinks that this is bad art. The play is directly an imitation of action, and the characters should be manifested in their action, and their actions should rise out of the circumstances in which they are placed, and these, from the plot of the play. Therefore, Aristotle thinks, the plot is the "principle" or foundation out of which all the rest of the play arises—"the soul" as it were "of the whole tragedy." Tragedy is a representation of action and the characters of the persons are revealed in their actions, and these form the story of the play

Structure.

§6. The principle consideration, then, according to Aristotle, is the *plot* of the play and its structure because it is through these that thought and character are revealed. What he says regarding structure is of interest, because the modern idea of a play of the classical or Greek type is drawn mainly from what Aristotle said on this subject, or is deduced from what he said.

The fundamental condition of a good play and that out of which its other conditions rise,

is *unity of structure*. It must contain a plurality of parts, and the parts must rise out of one another and depend on one another in such a way that they make up one self-consistent whole (as forming parts or branches of one comprehensive event and corresponding to natural growth, and organisation in nature.

For a tragedy must have a certain "magnitude," *i.e.*, must include a certain number of parts, and its beauty will consist (partly at least) in such co-ordination of all its parts (like the parts of an organism) as will make them all to be *one*. And in order that they may be made to be one, "the parts of the action must be such that if any one of them is withdrawn or removed to another place, the whole work is broken up and disorganised" (repeated by Coleridge). And this harmony of parts which makes the many to be one, is the essence of the beautiful. If the thing is too small there can be no parts to produce harmony, and if too large, the mind cannot grasp the whole as one.

The Unities.

From this fundamental condition of *unity* or harmony of parts to make one whole, the much discussed *unities* of *time* and *place* may be deduced :—

(*a*) If the action imitated be drawn out through a long period of years, it will not be

one, but will consist of many events, and therefore inconsistent with the organic unity required by the principle of the beautiful. Unity therefore requires that the action be limited a short time—Aristotle himself suggests, within the limits of one revolution of the sun. For the same reason, all plays of the classical type have been limited to one day. Italian, and French down to the triumph of the romantic movement about 1830—and certain English plays of the same type composed as experiments (Milton's *Samson*, Swinburne's *Atalanta* and *Erechtheus*, and most plays of Jonson. In Shakespeare on the contrary, the action often extends over many years, *e.g.*, *Winter's Tale*).

(*b*) Again if the action be divided between several places, the incidents cannot have that connection with each other which dramatic unity requires. Therefore, in plays of the classical type, the action represented is confined to one place—no change of scene is admitted. Events which take place elsewhere, but are necessary to complete the story, have to be related before the audience by a "messenger" (which introduces into the Greek play an element of epic narrative).

(*c*) Finally tragical incidents and comical incidents appeal to different states of mind and when the mind is in a state adapted to the one kind, it is pained by having the other suddenly

intruded upon it. Therefore the combination of tragical and comical incident in the play is inconsistent with the unity and harmony required by poetical art.

Therefore in plays of the classical type comical incidents are excluded from tragedy. Yet some have argued that they rather heighten each other's effect by contrast. Thus the porter's scene in *Macbeth* has been adduced as an example Others think that the one degrades and destroys the effect of the other, and ask the question: Can Shakespeare himself have written the porter-scene?

Particular Effects.

§7. Tragedy, then, is an imitation of action such as excites fear and pity. The effect is greater when the exciting incident comes as a *surprise*. But this effect will be destroyed altogether if the exciting incident comes in abruptly as if introduced artificially. To be truly surprising it must rise naturally though unexpectedly, out of the circumstances and character of the person.

This is why the conclusions of the plays of Euripides are sometimes unsatisfactory. In some cases he cannot make the result which he desires, work itself out naturally from preceding circumstances; but makes a god come down on the

stage (by some theatrical mechanism), and bring about the desired conclusion miraculously (whence the jest about a *deus ex machina* or god coming down unexpectedly in a theatrical machine, to set things right).

Surprises in Greek plays often took the forms of unexpected *recognitions*. A person is suddenly discovered to be a different person from what was supposed (a device at one time very common also in modern plays and novels).

Another kind of surprise is the sudden *reversal* of some expected result. Events seem to be tending inevitably towards a certain result, but in the end they are found to lead (though naturally) to a result quite different from what was expected. This appears sometimes as the "irony" of fate—a person thinks he is working out some great good for himself, but finds in the end that he has really been bringing about his own ruin (frequent in Sophocles).

It is not necessary to enter into the different ways by which recognitions and reversals were brought about in Greek plays as analysed by Aristotle.

Poetic Justice.

§8. The distinctive mark of tragedy, then, is that it imitates actions productive of *pity* and *fear*. But in many cases these emotions cannot be produced without producing at the same

time such painful effects as will destroy the pleasure of art. Subjects of this kind are unfit for poetic treatment.

Thus the sight of a perfectly virtuous man brought down from prosperity to adversity, is not a fitting subject because it shocks our feeling of consistency and justice. The sight of a thoroughly bad man raised to prosperity is unsuitable for the same reason. The proper medium (Aristotle's "golden means," between extremes) is to be found in the lives of average men, *viz.*, when such men fall into adversity through some fault or error of their own. Such a person may be in a position of great reputation and prosperity, but he may have committed some error in his past life or have some weakness which has escaped notice, and this error or weakness may work out consequences unobserved, and may lead at last to tragical catastrophe (what about *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*? This question of the truly tragic has given rise to much discussion see Bradley's Essay.)

But what are the actions which affect us most strongly with pity or fear? They must be actions of persons on persons—not physical catastrophes of nature. Aristotle, looking back over the Greek tragic drama, comes to the conclusion that the most fearful and pitiable occurrences, are fatal injuries inflicted by members of a family against other members of the same. Such

stories of family crime and error were frequent in Greek cycles of legend, and were the favourite subjects of the great tragedians, Æschylus and Sophocles; and this makes Aristotle think that incidents of this kind must be the most tragical and moving of all.

Dénouement.

§9. A Greek tragedy involves two phases—the *complication*, or gathering of events towards a crisis involving some mystery or difficulty, and the *solution* or *dénouement*—the unravelling of the mystery, or solving of the difficulty. And these phases—complication and development—should work themselves out naturally. The fault of Euripides in his dénouements has been referred to above.

Diction in Tragedy.

§10 As for the diction, language and style of tragedy its great excellence consists in this, that it be *clear* without being *mean*. This brings up the modern question of "poetic diction." There are two extremes, *meanness* on the one side, and *extravagance* on the other. In avoiding the one extreme, the poet must guard himself against falling into the other.

Clearness can be best attained by the use of common words. But this may give his work the appearance of being low and mean. On the

other hand, an appearance of depth and grandeur may be attained by the use of *unusual* words and phrases, by which he means such as are rare, metaphorical, periphrastic. But a work composed mainly in language of this kind would be but a mass of riddles and barbarisms (jargon).

The best language, then must be that lying in the middle between such extremes (the "golden mean"). The proper use of selected words, idioms and metaphors not in common use, will raise the style above commonplace; and the use of familiar words in the right places will give it perspicuity.

Critics, Aristotle thinks, have not observed how much the effect of a verse depends often on a single word, and how much it may be weakened by a too common word, and how much it may be strengthened by one less familiar. Nevertheless he shows that even at that time there were critics like Wordsworth, who ridiculed poets for trusting for effect to the use of uncommon words and artificial phrases (as Longinus did afterwards).

As for metaphor—which he explains as the "carrying over" of a word from one object to another on account of their having something in common—he does not seem to understand its use and effect as Shelley does. The latter understood it as an indispensable means of bringing out the deeper meanings of things, by picturing

the abstract in the concrete. Aristotle seems to regard it rather as a kind of ornament merely, used chiefly in poetry, and helping to distinguish poetry from prose and to be used sparingly. Indeed fully expressed metaphors are but little used in the classic tragedians, who seem to regard metaphors as ornaments merely, and, like Wordsworth, to regard ornament as an excrescence. These more elementary ones which are necessary to the making of words as Shelley shows, are of course as common as in other highly developed languages.

Epic Poetry.

§11. With poetic imitation in the form of narrative, Aristotle does not speak at great length in the treatise (though its epics are now considered the chief glory of Greek poetry). This is partly because much of what he has said of tragedy applies to epic also.

An epic must not be like a history. A history is a record of a series of events running on indefinitely, without beginning or end, with no connection but time and space—nor a biography, recounting all a man's actions from birth to death.

Like a tragedy, epic must deal with a single event containing under it many incidents, but at the same time forming one connected whole, having a definite beginning, middle and end—though it will cover more incidents and extend

over a longer time and therefore possess less artistic unity than a tragedy.

Still it must possess sufficient unity of plan and purpose to be embraced within a single comprehensive *view*, as an organic whole—otherwise it would not be a poem (in the classical sense). For this purpose an epic also must be contained within a reasonable limit of time. Hence the whole 10 years War of Troy, or the whole life of Achilles, could not be brought within the scope of one epic poem. The poet must, therefore, fix upon some crisis or climax in a history or life, and deal chiefly with the incidents contained within this critical phase and their own immediate *dénouement*, leaving the rest of the history or life to be known from reference or implication. Really necessary incidents not falling within the chosen crisis, may be related by some of the characters of the epic, by way of episode or digression from the main narrative (as the adventures of Ulysses told by himself in the *Odyssey*; the wanderings of Æneas in the *Æneid*; the story of revolt in heaven and creation of the earth, told by *Raphael* in *Parc. Lost*). But so far as the main body of the epic is concerned the poet should "plunge at once into the middle of things."

The epic poet is able to include much more in his poem than the tragic poet. The tragedian can include only what he can represent on the

age, and that is only the events of a particular y and place. The epic poet can include events f removed from one another in place. He can the same elements of character and surprise mysteries of plot, and can present what might or should be, as much as the tragedian. Nevertheless, Aristotle thinks that tragedy is a higher form of poetry than epic.

Aristotle remarks, like Wordsworth, that there may be intervals in the epic narrative which do not give any opportunity for poetic treatment. What is to be done with these? Wordsworth thinks that they should be given just as what they are, *i.e.*, as simple prose (perhaps metrical). Aristotle, however, seems to think with 18th century poets and Coleridge that in such places the style should be more carefully "elaborated" than elsewhere, by which he seems to mean that the commonness of the passage should be concealed by rhetorical ornament (poetic diction). Passages full of action and character are spoilt, he admits (as Wordsworth held) by artificial ornaments of style; but in such vacant places, rhetorical diction will be excusable.

The extant portion of the treatise ends with discussion of the comparative rank of Tragic and Epic poetry with the result here referred to. Comedy is but slightly treated and lyric poetry, only referred to. These may have been treated fully in the part which has been lost.